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FORGET-ME-NOTS

JULIA KAVANAGH

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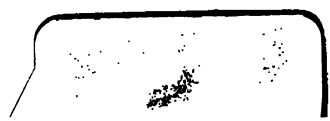


FORGET-ME-NOTS.

BY

JULIA KAVANAGH,

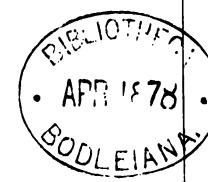
AUTHOR OF "NATHALIE," &c.

"O world! so few the years we live,
Would that the life which thou dost give
Were life indeed!
Alas! thy sorrows fall so fast,
Our happiest hour is when at last
The soul is freed."

LONGFELLOW.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. III.



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Nina, the Witch.

THERE was formerly but one bridge for the river of Manneville; a little primitive bridge consisting of three broad, uneven slabs of stone, resting on two rough, unhewn low pillars. It was a tottering, unsafe thing, without the shadow of a parapet; but it let to the Passée, and the Passée or passage—as its name implies—is a shady path that goes on by the river-side till it brings you within view of the island behind Maître Salomon's mill. That island is a long, low strip of land, all trees, all

grass, all verdure and gloomy freshness. It divides the little river for a while, then ends as it began—in cool, green banks, lying so deep in shadow that only at noonday a bright sunbeam can steal in among the tall rushes and trailing weeds.

It is a lovely spot; yet it long bore a bad name in Manneville, and the solitary thatched cottage that lies half buried among the trees remained without a tenant for many years after Père Jean was found dead in his bed one morning. Père Jean was supposed to have left heaps of buried treasure, and as he had neither kith nor kin in Manneville, every one in the village felt a sort of right to his inheritance, and every one, after a fashion, tried to get hold of it. Treasure-seekers long haunted the island stealthily, though the landlord, Maître Thomas Méchin, sternly forbade such intrusion on his demesnes; but of their own accord they gave up the fruitless search, warned off, it was said, by the ghost of Père Jean himself, whose little, sad old face they saw flitting behind the

trees. And so, guarded by the dead, the island was left to its verdure and solitude, and every year the trees cast a deeper and a broader shadow over the thatched cottage, that mouldered away to decay, still untenanted, whilst birds made their nests undisturbed under its low eaves, and sang very sweetly to one another in the cool, early mornings of the cool, Norman summer.

Much amazed was Manneville to learn one afternoon that a strange woman and her child had moved into the cottage that morning. Maître Thomas Méchin, smoking on the door-step of his own strong stone house by the bridge, chuckled to see the idlers of the village go by on their way to the island; but he frowned as he heard the comments they made on their return. Laure, his neighbour, was especially bitter. That strange woman had such black eyes and large earrings; and then she carried her pitcher on her head instead of carrying it in her hand like a Christian; and then the child was more like a monkey.

"That woman is my tenant," interrupted Maître Thomas, eyeing Laure askance.

"And her child is a monkey," persisted Laure.

"Thomas, go in," said Maître Thomas to his son, who had just come in from school, and stood listening to all this with his greedy ears.

Thomas, junior—a slim, wiry lad, with keen grey eyes, and a shrewd young face—went in as he was told; but he also went out by a back door, and, taking a round, he made his way to the river. When he came in front of the island, he found a youthful crowd gaping at the plank that had been thrown across the stream as a bridge, but not venturing upon it yet. Thomas pushed his way among the boys and girls, strode the plank with the step of a master, and entered the island whistling. In a moment the others were at his heels, and scampered about the green wilderness, laughing and shouting rudely till they came to the cottage. The low, damp

tenement had not yet lost its look of abandonment and neglect, and neither in the garden, overrun with weeds and nettles, nor anywhere outside the house, could Thomas see the sallow woman who wore such strange earrings and carried her pitcher in so unchristian a fashion; but, in her stead, he saw the child. It sat on the threshold of the open door, with the gloom of the low, ill-lit room behind its little weird figure. It was a dark-haired, dark-eyed child, with a small, sallow face, by far too expressive of thought and suffering for its five or six years of life. It wore a shabby black frock, edged with scarlet, that had seen better days, and when Thomas and the other children came up, it was eating some thin looking soup from a wooden porringer.

"It's a girl," said Thomas, deliberately.

The child left off eating, and stared at him with a frown on her little dark brow.

"And it is a witch," continued Thomas, sententiously.

"A witch! a witch!" cried all the boys and girls behind him. "A witch! a witch!"

The child rose in angry fear, and, rushing into the cottage, slammed the door violently behind her. But the cry, "A witch! a witch!" continued loud and shrill, till the cottage window opened softly, and a little brown hand flung out a pig potato at the besiegers. A cry of pain declared that this missile had done its work. Another potato quickly followed, then another, and another again; in short, there was a perfect shower of potatoes that did considerable execution.

"It is a witch!" said Thomas, retreating at the head of his men in some dismay.

"Let us fling them back to her," suggested a bold spirit; but before Thomas could protest against a course that must have imperilled the window-panes of his father's cottage, a tall, dark woman strode in amongst them all, pushed Thomas aside, gave his right hand neighbour a cuff, and his left hand neighbour another,

drove the children before her like a flock of chickens, picked up the potatoes, entered the cottage and bolted the door. There was no need to tell Thomas and his companions, as they recrossed the water in some haste and confusion, pushing each other, there was no need, we say, to tell them what took place when the stranger woman entered the cottage. The loud screams of the child declared it but too well.

"I wish I had not called her a witch," thought Thomas, walking faster not to hear the little victim's cries. And very sincerely did he wish it when he went home an hour later.

"You have called the strange child 'witch,'" said Maître Thomas Méchin in cold anger. "Her name is Philippina, but lest you should forget it, come upstairs with me."

Maître Thomas Méchin's method for strengthening his son's memory was of the Spartan kind, and so far efficacious that the lad never called Philippina witch

again; but the name clung to her for all that. Her mother called her Nina, and all Manneville, young and old, Maître Thomas and his son excepted, called her Nina the witch.

Maître Thomas Méchin had quarrelled with his only sister when she married Lambert the tailor of Fontaine, with whom he had disagreed once about the cloth of a waistcoat. The quarrel was made up when the tailor died, and Madame Lambert then came with her only child, a girl of sixteen, to pay her brother a long visit. Séraphine—high-flown names abound in Normandy—was a round, rosy, and blue-eyed girl. She got on very well with Thomas, who was just then turned eighteen. No more passed between them, but all Manneville soon knew that if the cousins went about so much together, it was because they were to marry; and somehow or other, and though they never exchanged a word on the subject, the young cousins knew it too, and liked it, Thomas especially; and liking it, he natu-

rally stuck rather close to his pretty cousin. So, on a rainy day, when Séraphine sat alone knitting by Maître Thomas Méchin's open parlour window, Thomas, though he had plenty to do about the house, no sooner found out where she was, than he went in to keep her company. He did not say much; Thomas was no great talker, but he stood behind her chair whistling softly to himself, with his hands in his pockets. Séraphine was too good a knitter to look at her work; she accordingly gazed out of the window. The gloomy trees of the passée rose against a grey, cloudy sky; the stones of the little bridge shone with wet; the heavy rain drops fell in the river and made white, eddying pools there: and a flock of ducks flapped their wings as they went sailing by. Séraphine thought the prospect a dull one, and somewhat pettishly she supposed, "That no one ever crossed that bridge."

Even as she spoke the solitary figure of a girl came out of the gloom of the passée

and paused for a moment in the middle of the bridge to steady the pitcher she carried on her head. Séraphine, who had never seen a pitcher so carried before, started at her amazed. She only saw a slender girl of thirteen or so, with a slim, straight figure, dark hair, and darker eyes, and a pale, serious face. As she walked on towards the house, Thomas bent forward and, looking at her over his cousin's shoulder, said half pleasantly, half banteringly:

"Good day to you, Nina."

Nina's only reply to this greeting was a flashing look of her dark eyes, and she went on in scornful silence. Thomas looked after her till she vanished behind the house; then he whistled again.

"Why, who is that girl?" asked Séraphine, putting down her knitting, "and how she carries her pitcher, and what a look she gave you!"

Thomas carelessly answered that it was only Nina, and that she always carried her pitcher so. They were southerns and that was their way.

"But what a look she gave you!"

"Oh! that was her way too," answered Thomas, as he bade Séraphine look at a white duck. But Séraphine wanted to talk about the dark girl, and not about the white duck. Thomas, however, was reticent. Nina's mother went about the country selling tapes and laces, he said, and Nina stayed at home and wove, and promised to be one of the best weavers in Manneville, and never spoke to any one, and that was all.

But it was not all, for presently the dark and slender figure of Nina appeared again on the bridge, with her pitcher on her head. She gave the window a scornful look of her dark eyes as she went by, then dropped her eyelids, and soon disappeared in the gloom of the passée. Séraphine put down her knitting and looked up in her cousin's face.

"Why, that girl hates you!" she said.

"Let her!" laughed Thomas, and not caring to say more, he left the room.

But the very next day, when he took his

cousin to the little wood that lies midway between Manneville and Fontaine, they came upon Nina again. There is a part of the wood where the trees are old, and throw a deep, black shadow on the ground around them. There, too, the brushwood grows high and tangled, and the spot has a wild, lone look, from which Séraphine was shrinking back with something like fear when she suddenly saw Nina, lying half coiled on a little fagot of sticks, and fast asleep. She rested on that hard pillow with the fearless abandonment of childhood. Her arms were outstretched; her head was thrown back; her breath came evenly through her parted lips; but Nina had been crying herself to sleep, for her large dark eye-lashes were wet, and the tears on her round cheeks were not yet dry.

"Get up, Nina; you must not sleep here," said Thomas, bending over her.

Nina opened her eyes, gave the pair a grave look, then closed her eyes again. Thomas laughed as he turned away with

his cousin. That was another of Nina's ways, to fall asleep in the most unlikely places, he said. He had often seen her lying so close to the river it was a wonder she was not drowned; but she was an odd girl, and her mother ill-used her.

"She is a witch," severely said Séraphine, who had derived her information from Laure that very morning.

"There are no witches," sharply replied Thomas.

"No witches! why our charmer in Fontaine finds them out and——"

"Your charmer is a rogue."

"And I say that girl is a witch, and Laure says she never goes to mass, never says her prayers."

"And I say that Laure is the witch, and wants your charmer, Séraphine."

Whereupon Séraphine lost her temper, and the cousins had their first quarrel. They were both sulky at supper that evening, and Maître Thomas, eyeing them keenly, asked what ailed them. Before either could reply, the kitchen door opened,

and Laure burst in like a Greek chorus, to supply the needful information.

"Never in all Manneville was there anything like it," she cried, raising her hands, and turning up her eyes; "never; a child, a charmer, and—a witch."

"What!" cried Maître Thomas, putting down his spoon.

"The garde-champêtre was called in, and the Maire had to put on his scarf, and keep the peace; and you must live out of the way, not to have heard the uproar it made," said Laure still breathless. "I shall not sleep a wink to night! A witch in Manneville."

"A witch," cried Madame Lambert. "Why do you not send for our charmer? When poor dear Lambert died we were run over with mice; we got cats and cats, but the mice only drove them away. So we knew we were bewitched, and so the charmer——"

"And what about the witch," interrupted Maître Thomas, who heard unusual sounds of loud talking in the street.

"Why, Benjamin's boy has been wasting away ever so long," answered Laure, with sudden perspicuity, lest Madame Lambert should come in with the mice again. "Seeing it was bewitched, Benjamin sent for the charmer from Fontaine. He came two hours ago and he said the child was bewitched, and that the first person that should pass by the door, without stopping, was the witch. So Benjamin and his wife watched, and who should first pass by the door without stopping, but Nina!"

"What did they do to her?" asked Thomas, rising. He looked as cool as ever, but his lips were compressed, and there was an angry sparkle in his grey eyes.

"Nothing," answered Laure. "They had no time. She went by so fast—it was dusk too—that they only knew her by the pitcher she carried on her head. When they thought to pay her out, wicked thing, she was in her island, and as she had removed the plank they could not get at her. However, they made a fine uproar about it, and all that end of Man-

neville turned out, and the garde-champêtre had to meddle, and it is not over yet."

"Thomas," said Maître Thomas Méchin, to his son, "go and see that they don't do some mischief to the cottage."

Thomas left the kitchen without a word of reply, whilst his father composedly went on with his soup. Turning his back on the village, the young man crossed the bridge, and walked rapidly through the passée. The night, though moonlit, was tempestuous; a strong gale came from the sea, and the tall trees moaned dismally, as Thomas walked beneath them. He met no one, though when he reached the river-bank that faces the island, he saw that the grass had been trodden and the bushes broken down. The plank was gone, but Thomas knew of a spot near the dyke of Maître Salomon's mill where the river is narrow. He found his way to this through the underwood, and leaped across the stream into the island. It was very silent, and the young man was cautiously making his way towards the

glowworm light of the little cottage, when he heard a low moaning which seemed to come from among the reeds of the river. Softly and noiselessly he turned back and stole through the rank high grass till he came to the spot where the river widens into a lake, and there he saw Nina. He knew the slender outline of her figure as she stood on a rock just above the water. The night, as we have said, was tempestuous, and the tall trees tossed their broad boughs over the dark surface of the little lake. Everything was gloomy and ominous, but nothing, Thomas felt, could be more gloomy or more desolate than the mood of the girl before him. She stood bending forward, as if that black world at her feet attracted her strangely; then she drew back with a low shuddering moan, as if she feared it; then she raised her hands above her head, in what seemed to Thomas a passion of despair, and bent again. With a spring he was by her side, and had seized her in his two strong arms.

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"You shall not do it," he said, but not speaking loud; "you shall not do it, Nina."

Amazement at first kept her mute and still in his clasp; but if some serpent had stung her, she could not have snatched herself more suddenly away from his grasp, or turned upon him more fiercely than she did at the sound of his voice.

"How dare you!" she cried, stamping her foot and shaking back her head in wrath so sudden that her loosened hair fell round her shoulders. "You have made me a byword, so that the very children will not look at me, so that my own mother has just hunted me out of the house calling me 'witch, witch;' then how dare you come near me?"

"I was a boy, and I have rued it bitterly," replied Thomas, sullenly; "but now no one shall harm you, whilst I am by, Nina."

"Where were you when they threw stones at me across the river?" asked Nina bitterly.

"Who did?" angrily asked Thomas.

"And what is it to you?" she retorted. "Do I want you to defend me! Why, I have done you more harm than you ever did me," she added, passing from complaint to revengeful boasting.

Thomas could not help laughing.

"I have," cried Nina, stung by his contempt. "Who stole into the schoolroom and smashed your French horn on the morning of the competition between the band of Manneville and that of Fontaine, when everyone said, through your fine playing, Manneville would win? You had called me witch, but I had you there," said Nina triumphantly.

"I am glad to know it was you who did that!" remarked Thomas coolly. "It vexed me whilst I thought it was one of those fellows of Fontaine, but what need I care for what a little spiteful thing like you has done or can do!"

The involuntary scorn of his tone seemed to madden the child.

"Ah! but I shall do more," she cried

in her passion. "You have called me witch, and I am a witch, and a witch you will find me. When you have a trouble or a grief, mind you thank me for it."

But the angry vehemence of the southern girl was thrown away on the cool Norman youth. He had not an atom of superstition in his clear, young brain, and with a laugh he answered: "You are no witch, and I am not afraid of you; and now let bygones be bygones, and listen to me."

Before Nina could attempt to escape he had seized her in his arms, and holding her fast, he resumed composedly: "I have done you a wrong, but I will atone for it. I will stand between you and Manneville. I will take you from your mother, who ill-uses you. I will be your friend, Nina, and when I marry my cousin, you shall live with us, and let anyone dare to call you witch! But you must alter your ways; you must not carry your pitcher in that outlandish fashion, and you must go to church and be a Christian; and now let us kiss and be friends, Nina."

For Nina had heard him so patiently that Thomas thought he had prevailed over this obstinate little maiden; but when he bent and thought to kiss her, Nina's teeth, set in his cheek, drew from him a sharp cry of pain.

"You little traitress," he cried, shaking her angrily, before he released her; "thank your stars that you are a girl. Do you know that I could just throw you into that water and no one be the wiser?"

"Try it," defiantly answered Nina, as she vanished among the trees. "And now if I have my scar so will you have yours. So I was to have been your drudge and your servant, was I?"

She laughed a low little laugh, that grew fainter in the darkness, then ceased. Thomas remained alone in the stormy night, with the moon looking down mockingly at him from the billowy clouds, and the trees groaning drearily in the gale. He felt his cheek; it was bleeding, but he did not care; he even laughed as he walked away.

"She will not go and drown herself now," he thought; "biting me will have done that much good. Only what will Séraphine say when she sees the mark of her teeth!"

Séraphine said nothing. When Thomas left the house Madame Lambert had insisted on telling her story of the mice; and her brother had spoken of the mice, the cats, the dead tailor, and the living charmer with such withering contempt that Madame Lambert had risen from her unfinished supper, and that moment departed with her daughter to return no more.

"So that little witch, Nina, has kept her word," thought Thomas, sadly vexed to have lost his pretty cousin.

Seven years had gone by, and wrought their changes. Benjamin's boy had recovered, thus lowering Nina's reputation as a witch of power. She was as hateful as ever in the eyes of Manneville, but by no means so terrible; for a witch whose

work a charmer can undo is no great things after all. She spoke to, and held intercourse with no one, but remained at home and sat at her loom all the day, whilst her mother went about selling her wares. Thomas was now a man of twenty-five. He looked nearly thirty, he was so staid. He was not handsome, but he was strong and well-built, and sense and will were written in his face. His grey eyes seemed to look through you, they were so shrewd, but they could be kind as well as keen, when it so pleased their owner. He had never spoke once to Nina since she had bitten him, nor once been near his cousin, for the quarrel between his aunt and father still held on. And so the seven years had gone by when Maître Thomas Méchin and Nina's mother both fell ill at the same time, and to both, though neither knew it, illness was to end in death.

Maître Thomas, however, had his misgivings, for he wrote to his sister, asking her to come and see him, and handing the

letter to his son, he said one evening, "You will marry Séraphine, will you not, my boy? You always liked her, and you know I wish it."

"Very well," answered Thomas, after a pause. "I will."

"And if Nina's mother does not pay her rent by next Monday, mind you give her notice to quit. I will wait no longer for my money," querulously added Maître Thomas, whose heart still clung to the goods of the world he was leaving. "And bid Benjamin's boy take the letter at once; and go down, and stay below, and have an eye to Jeanne's doings, my lad."

Thomas so far obeyed, that he went down immediately to the kitchen, and, putting the letter in the hand of Benjamin's boy, he bade him go off at once with it to Fontaine, but instead of remaining to watch Jeanne, the servant's doings —his father had long been a widower— the young man went and smoked his pipe, a sorrowful one, at the parlour window. It was wide open. Thomas, as he leaned

against it, saw the bridge, and that part of the river which widens there into a sort of pond, and where the water is so soft and clear that all the women of that end of Manneville came to it to wash their linen. Half a dozen were so engaged now: amongst them was Laure, who held forth as usual. And apart from all the rest, excluded by her pride as well as by her name for witchcraft, was Nina. She might have found a spot nearer home, to wash in, but Nina had a defiant spirit, and she chose to brave her foes. The sun was nearly setting. The sky was one sheet of flame, the trees of the passée looked almost black as they rose against it, the uneven stones of the little bridge seemed on fire, they were so red, and the water of the little river carried liquid gold in every one of its ripples; but nowhere did the sunset light fall with a richer radiance than on Nina's dark head, and charming face. For Nina was beautiful; her enemies confessed it, and indeed, laid it all to magic art. Nina had philtres and

washes, they said, which gave her dark eyes their splendour, and to her cheeks their bloom, pure as that of the wild rose. The spot where she knelt washing away was so nigh the window that Thomas could have counted the sprigs of the pattern on the cotton handkerchief tied round her neck, had he so pleased. As to that, he might be counting them, so fixed and sullen was the gaze he fastened on the kneeling girl, and all the while, Laure, as we have said, held forth, and Thomas heard every word she uttered, her voice was so loud and shrill. Laure was talking about Père Jean's buried treasures. Twice, declared Laure, the miser's hoards had been found, and twice the lucky finders had been betrayed by the old earth-stained silver five-franc pieces, which they spent in the shops of Manneville, so that, "there goes one of Père Jean's pieces," had become a by-word. "But there is a third treasure left," pursued Laure, whilst the listeners all heard her with greedy ears, "a potful of silver buried under three

stones"—Laure's information was both accurate and minute—"one black, one grey, and one white; but one should be a witch to find the spot, and, thank heaven, *I* am no witch."

The other women laughed; Nina suddenly raised her head, and doing so, met the gaze of Thomas bent full upon her. They exchanged one rapid look, then each glanced another way. Thomas left the window, and Nina, whose task was done, rose, crossed the bridge, and went home along the passée.

Nina would have scorned to bite Thomas now, but she hated him still, and though she was not sordid, she was revengeful. Suddenly she paused in the path, as there flashed across her mind the recollections of a wild hidden nook on the island, close to the edge of the water, the very spot where she had bitten Thomas seven years before. And on that spot there were three stones, and surely one was black, and one was grey, and one was white. What if Père Jean's treasure were there?

Nina's heart leaped wildly at the thought. Her mother had never trusted her, and had now been speechless for many days. Nina knew that she had money somewhere; but she knew no more, and had been put to sore straits thereby. Her debt to the Méchins exasperated her. To find money on their land, and pay them with it, would be the thing after Nina's own heart. She could not resist the temptation, as she crossed over into the island, of going to look at the three stones before she entered the cottage. The blue mists of evening were already stealing through the trees; and soft and noiseless as they, Nina, having set down her burden, glided on till she reached the spot. Cautiously she parted the tangled brushwood with either hand, and then started back on finding herself face to face with Thomas, who had entered the island at the narrow part of the river, nigh Maître Salomon's mill.

For a moment each stood still looking at the other. They had not exchanged

one word, good or bad, for seven years ; since they had parted on that very spot. At length Thomas, as if he had come on that erand and none other, said :—

" Tell your mother that my father wants his money before next Monday, Nina."

Having said this much, he walked away without waiting for a reply. Nina too walked away, shivering from head to foot. That message from his father was a threat, and she must submit to the insult. Oh ! to give these Méchins their money and to find Père Jean's treasure ! She revelled as only the poor can in the thought. What if she found all that gold and silver ! But what if Thomas was after it too, and had come to identify the spot ? Should she let him be beforehand with her ? Nina clenched her little hands. Never, if she could help it, should he, her enemy, her wronger, enjoy that money. Ten times rather would she take and throw it into the river than let him have it. As soon as it was night, and her mother was asleep, she would steal out again and look for the treasure.

It was getting very dark, and Nina almost hoped, as she entered the cottage, to find her mother in that torpid slumber which every day became deeper; but she had scarcely opened the door, when even in the twilight she could see the sick woman's pale face and glittering eyes. She smoothed her pillow, she gave her a drink, but her mother remained restless and wakeful. Twice Nina tried to escape, and twice those watchful eyes that never lost sight of her kept her back; and it was night now, dark night; and at this time Thomas might be digging up the treasure that lay hidden under the three stones, for Nina had succeeded in convincing herself that it was really there. And so she sat, looking at her sick mother in a fever that grew hotter and fiercer as the night wore on, till suddenly a thought struck her.

"Mother," she said, starting up from her chair, and going up to the sick-bed, "we have no money, and Maître Méchin wants the rent. As I was walking by the

bridge, I overheard Laure talking about Père Jean's buried treasure. She said it was hidden under three stones, one black, one grey, and one white; there are three such stones close by here, and if I leave you now it is to go and try if the treasure be there."

She stood and waited. Not for an answer; none could come, but for some token of assent. Her mother gave her none, but looked at her with the same fixed stare; yet it seemed to Nina that something had passed over that wasted face, which said that she might go and try.

When the cottage door closed upon her, it seemed to Nina that of all the dark nights in the year, this was the darkest. She had brought no light, lest it should betray her, but she had no difficulty in finding her way to the spot where the three stones lay. She knew it all; many and many a time she had brought to it her troubles and her grief, telling them, in her childish way, to her faithful friend the

little river. Guided by the low murmur of the waters, she went on till she knew that she was where she wanted to be; then groping in the darkness, she felt the three stones, and began to use the spade which she had brought with her for that purpose. The stones were not very large, and Nina moved them more easily than she had expected. She softly put her hand in the hole she had made, and uttered a low cry of triumph as she felt something lying there. It was, it must be, an earthen vessel. She lifted it up, and there was a faint chink as of silver within it. Beside herself with joy, Nina hastened home and broke into the cottage, with the cry: "Mother, I have found the treasure! I have found it."

But Nina's mother had closed her restless eyes at last; her face lay on the pillow, still and colourless, and did not waken into consciousness at Nina's voice. It was as well, for when, trembling with excitement, Nina knelt on the floor and poured out upon it the contents of the

earthen pot, she only found plenty of mould, a few loose stones, and nine silver five-franc pieces, all stained and discoloured.

Was this Père Jean's treasure? thought Nina in blank disappointment. She had expected heaps of coined money, and she got nine silver pieces. Yet, as she counted them one by one and cleaned them in her apron, Nina thought better of her find. It was not much, but it would pay the rent; and then she had found it on the land of the Méchins, and in some manner had taken it from them.

With the first blush of dawn Nina stole out. She wanted to replace the three stones; also she was not without the vague hope that some of Père Jean's five-franc pieces might have remained in the hole where the pot had been. But when, after walking though the heavy dew, she came to the spot still sleeping in gloomy morning freshness, she found Thomas standing there, looking moodily, thought Nina, at the broken earth and scattered

stones. On hearing her, he raised his keen grey eyes, and bent them on the girl's soft dark face, so soft spite all its scorn of him—the scorn of a heart that might have loved much, if wrong had not embittered it early.

"Nina," he said, speaking first, "what brings you here? Why have these stones been disturbed?"

"Ah! Why, indeed!" And she laughed a low clear laugh of defiance.

"Do not forget the rent," said Thomas somewhat sternly.

Nina put her hand in her pocket, took out six five-franc pieces, and placed them in his hand without a word. Thomas bit his lip, and muttering something about giving her a receipt the next day, he turned his back upon her, and walked away.

Nina's heart swelled with triumph as she looked after him. There remained very little to her of Père Jean's treasure now; but what matter; he had come there for it, he knew that she had been

beforehand with him; he knew that she had got the hidden hoard, and he would never know how small a hoard it was after all. But were those nine pieces all indeed that the old miser had hidden in the island. If she looked, could she not find more, only where should she look? And so time went on, self-questioning and castle-building, till she entered the cottage and started back with a low cry as her mother's dead face lay before her on its white pillow in the morning light.

That same evening Maître Thomas Méchin died, without having seen his sister, who neither came nor answered his letter; and the next day landlord and tenant were buried in the little churchyard of Manneville.

All that Maître Thomas had, and it was worth having, went to his only son, as Manneville knew; but Manneville did not know that in her mother's mattrass Nina found a little bagful of silver pieces, the savings of a lifetime, and plenty of hand-

some and valuable gold jewellery, the heir-looms of an old decayed family.

Many things were out of order in the farm, and Thomas found plenty to do. Nina, too, returned to her weaving, and led a lonely life in her green island, like a young Circe. "But she was known, thank Heaven," as Laure piously said. The young men of Manneville could not help giving the beautiful girl longing looks, but her evil name kept them aloof from Nina the Witch. She and Thomas rarely met now, and so time wore on, and days, and weeks, and months passed away.

Late one evening Thomas, now Maître Thomas Méchin, came home from a long visit which he had been paying his uncle of Blossville. As he stood on the kitchen hearth unfastening his heavy cloak, he asked Jeanne for the news of Manneville. Jeanne pursed up her lips and looked firm. News! she knew of no news. She was not a gadder like Laure, thank heaven. Then, in the same breath she added:

"The curé's servant is ill, and Benjamin, whose boy was bewitched, you know, broke his arm last week, and your cousin Séraphine was married on Thursday, in Fontaine, to a butcher, and they say that Nina, the witch, must be dead, for no one has seen her for the last ten days."

Thomas looked stunned. "Any one could see," said Jeanne to Laure, "how fond he had been of his cousin. For when I told him she was married, he just stared and walked out of the house."

Yes, out into the darkness of the night went Thomas. A chill rain was falling, but he heeded it not. He crossed the bridge; he went through the gloomy passée, and as the narrow plank that led over to the island was not in its usual place, he did not look for it, but waded through the river till he stood on the other shore. From this spot he should have seen the light in Nina's cottage; but he did not. No yawning grave could be darker than the island on this dark night. He raised his voice and called aloud

"Nina!"

A startled bird rustled in a tree above his head, and some little frightened creature scampered away close by his side, then all was still again.

Thomas went on, stumbling in the darkness, straight to the cottage he went, seeming to find it by instinct as a bird finds its nest. It was black and silent, but the door was on the latch, and as Thomas opened it and went in, the smouldering ashes on the hearth told him that Nina was not dead after all. In a moment he had found an old iron candlestick, and lit the end of tallow candle in it, and even before he had put it down on the table, he had seen Nina.

Yes, there was Nina sitting on the chair opposite him, Nina with white lips and dark, sunken eyes, Nina pale as death, and looking like one who has been to Death's own door.

"Nina, you are ill," said Thomas.

"No," she answered with strange apathy.

"You are ill—did no one come nigh you?"

"No one," answered Nina.

Thomas set his teeth and clenched his fists in mute anger to think how hardened were the hearts of her kind against this poor girl.

"And so they would have let you die alone," he answered.

"Yes," replied Nina; "they would."

"Nina, I was away or that should not have been—but I am at home now and——"

"I want nothing," said Nina. "I worked to-day, but I am not strong yet and——"

She grew very white. Thomas quickly applied his brandy flask to her lips, and though she turned away from it with a shudder, she was too weak to resist him; but even that fiery draught did not seem to bring back life to her chilled heart. She did not faint as he had feared she would, but she sat there before him like one half dead. Thomas thrust a whole

faggot of wood on the hearth, till there shot up such a blaze as filled the room. He carried Nina, chair and all, to the warm glow; he chafed her icy hands till something like the warmth of life returned to them; he took off his heavy cloak and wrapped her in it, and Nina submitted to it all with the apathy of recent illness.

Sorrow and remorse filled the young man's heart as he saw her so helpless.

"Oh, Nina, forgive me," he said; "forgive me, Nina!" And yielding to an impulse which might not be wise, but which was honest, he stooped, and clasped her in an embrace full of repentant tenderness.

But never was attempted kiss so fatal as this. Before his lips could touch her cheek, Nina had sprung to her feet with a cry, and stood before him, herself once more. The strong spirit he had forced her to drink had given her new life. The light had come back to her eyes, the colour to her cheeks and the old hatred to her heart.

"How dare you?" she cried, "how dare you?"

"Nina," entreated Thomas, "let us be friends."

"Never!" she replied, clenching her small hands; "I hate you."

"Do you, Nina?" asked Thomas, in seeming wonder.

"You know I do, and if you do not hate me too, you are base."

"But why should I hate you, Nina?"

"Because so far as I could I have injured you," she answered, her passion rising with his calmness; "have you forgotten it?"

"You broke my French horn; well, I have got another. You bit me once"—he smiled as he said it; "well, Nina, your little teeth drew blood, but even as they left no scar on my cheek, so all your wrong doing has done me no harm—none."

Her eyes flashed, her lips quivered. "Have you forgotten the treasure?" she asked in a low tone. "Well then, I found it; I took it, and it was on your land. Yes, I found it beneath the three

stones—the treasure of Père Jean, the treasure that could have made a rich man of you; I found it and I took it."

She stood before him with extended hand, in the dramatic though unconscious beauty of her southern blood. But though he eyed her with strange keenness, as if his glance would penetrate the very soul of this passionate young creature, it was coolly that Thomas replied:

"You found nine five-franc pieces, six of which you gave me for rent the next morning, Nina: nine and no more."

Nina raised her two hands to her forehead, and pushing back her hair, she looked at Thomas.

"Then it was you who put that money there," she gasped; "it was you."

Thomas nodded, without looking at her, and sat down on a chair.

"And so," said Nina, "when I met you there you had come to hide the money and not for the rent, and when I saw you there again in the morning, you had come to see if I had taken it: well there is

something I did not mean to tell you; but I will, and taunt me with your alms after that, or dare to say that I have not injured you! Your father wrote to his sister to come. He wanted you to marry your cousin. Your aunt never came, and her daughter is another man's wife. Well, that was my doing."

This time Thomas started to his feet, his eyes sparkling with anger.

"It is not true," he cried, "you could not—you dared not."

"I dared not!" she laughed scornfully, "and I could not! As I was crossing the bridge, I saw you in your kitchen, giving the letter to Benjamin's boy, whom I had bewitched, you know, and I bewitched him again—for I stole the letter."

Thomas sat down again, and was long silent. When he spoke, he was so calm that the triumphant light died out of Nina's eyes.

"You did a wicked thing," he said. "God forgive you, Nina, but you also did me a great good," he added with a sigh

of relief. "If my poor father had exacted it, I would have married my cousin; but my wedding-day would have been the darkest in my life—no, I cannot think of it," he exclaimed, with something like passion.

Nina looked bewildered.

"Then, you did not like her?" said she.

"Like *her!*" he replied, looking her full in the face. "No, Nina, I did not like her; I liked another girl; but you are no witch, Nina; you are no witch, after all."

No, truly, Nina was no witch, for the revelation came to her like a thunder bolt falling at her feet. At first she seemed stunned, and it was not till Thomas plainly said, "And now, Nina, will you be my wife?" that she rallied.

"You cannot mean it. You say it to make a jest of me and have *your* revenge," she cried almost wildly. "How you would laugh if I were to believe you! But I do not; oh no, I do not."

"Try me, Nina."

She snatched up the light, and holding it aloft, she bent her dark eyes on his face; but Thomas only smiled. Then putting down the light, Nina went and fetched a broken ink-bottle, an old pen, and a scrap of paper, and she set them before him.

"Write it down," she said imperiously; "write that unless you marry me before a month is out, you will forfeit something — your house, your land — no matter what."

Thomas took the pen, and whilst Nina, holding the light, looked over his shoulder with feverish earnestness, he wrote:—

"I, Thomas Méchin, promise to marry Phillippina Sano this day week. Should I fail to do so, I will give her my house by the bridge, to be hers for ever."

Having signed this pledge, Thomas turned to Nina and said coolly:

"I put this day week because you are a lonely girl, Nina, and I must not come dangling after you. It would not do."

"Then, it is true?" was all Nina answered; "it is true?"

"This is Saturday," continued Thomas, still cool and business-like; "so we can have our banns out to-morrow, Nina. You must give me your certificate of birth, you know."

"And you like me!" said Nina, with a cry between joy and anguish. "It is not pity, as I thought. All Manneville hates and scorns me—my own mother never liked me—but *you* like me."

"Yes, I like you, Nina; and now you have my pledge," he added, thrusting the paper in her hand and closing her fingers upon it, "but where is yours to me?"

"What pledge can I give you?" asked Nina, opening her eyes in wonder.

"Well, Nina, when I wanted to kiss you seven years ago, you bit me, and when I was going to kiss you a while back, you called me names. So now, if you will give me an honest kiss, such a kiss as a good girl gives to the man who is to be her husband in a week, I shall hold you pledged to me as I am pledged to you."

Nina blushed and smiled divinely,

Thomas thought, then putting her two hands on his shoulders she held up her face to his, modestly, yet frankly.

"And now," she said, when he had kissed her, "tell me why you like me."

She had not moved away, and the face that looked up to his was the loveliest that Thomas had ever seen.

"You are beautiful, Nina," he replied in a low voice, "but it is not that. Seven years ago I found you not far from here, a poor, forlorn child, mad with despair. I had done you a great wrong, and that wrong seemed to make you mine. When I took you in my arms that night, Nina, and tried to soothe you, I felt that you belonged to me, and from that hour I was fond of you. I did not know how; I was only a lad; but I soon found it out. And now, Nina, you will marry me this day week."

"Yes," answered Nina dreamily.

"And, Nina, we will spend our wedding-day with my uncle, who lives beyond Fontaine. He is old, and cannot come to us."

Again Nina said "yes." So Thomas improved his opportunity. He did not speak about the pitcher, knowing Nina need carry a pitcher no more, but he spoke about going to mass every Sunday, and Nina, who looked as if she could never say him nay, again replied softly, "I will do as you wish."

"And now good-night, Nina," said Thomas, with a sigh, "for I must go and I must not come often either; for I do not want you to be talked about, as you are a lonely girl."

"Are you rich?" asked Nina suddenly.

"I am not, Nina, but neither am I poor."

"*I* am rich," she said, with sparkling eyes; "I found five hundred francs in silver, hidden in my mother's mattrass. And I have jewels, too," added Nina, "earrings, brooches, and chains. They have come down to me from the Sanos, who were great people once; but when they fell down in the world, my mother was ashamed, and that was why we came here."

Thomas smiled at her boasting, and again said "good-night." He had scarcely reached the river when Nina overtook him with a light in her hand. She wanted to put the plank in its place, she said; but Thomas asked, a little shortly, if he could not wade his way out as he had waded it in?

"You waded through that cold water!" said Nina, who had not thought of it before, and who shuddered to think of it now: as she heard it gurgling at her feet in the darkness. "And there are deep places in it, and you might have been drowned."

"I can swim," replied Thomas, drily. "Go in, Nina."

"Ah! you like me, you do like me," she said. The flickering light fell on her face, and Thomas could read there the ever new wonder which this strange tale of love wakened in the girl's heart. He did not ask if she liked him; she was to be his wife that day week; Thomas

wanted to know no more, and so they parted.

Early the next morning Thomas went over to the island. He found Nina very well, and at her loom, though it was Sunday. Somewhat austerely he informed her that she would have to give that up, and somewhat defiantly Nina answered, "Indeed." A change had come over Nina since they had parted, but Thomas chose to be blind. He explained his visit by asking for her certificate of birth, which she handed him at once, and seeing her so far compliant, Thomas requested his betrothed to go to high mass with him that morning. Without hesitation, Nina answered that he would find her under the church porch at half-past ten.

At a quarter past ten Thomas was prowling round the church, in a manner that surprised Manneville; but surprise became amazement when, as the half struck, Nina, the witch, who had not entered the church for years, joined him under the porch. She was dressed as no

girl in Manneville had been dressed before; for she wore a silk petticoat and a velvet jacket. The little cap perched on the top of her head was of costly lace, her long earrings were of gold, a gold chain was wound three times round her neck, and her little ungloved hands showed a ring on every finger. Of course, when she went in with Thomas and sat down by his side, on the bench of the Méchins, Manneville knew what was coming before the curé read the banns. When mass was over Thomas and Nina left the church arm-in-arm, and had a walk on the road to Fontaine, as is the Sunday custom of Manneville; then they turned back together till they came to the island. As they parted, Thomas told Nina that he would come and see her before the next Saturday.

"Why so?" she asked, with one foot on the plank which she was going to cross.

"To talk about the house."

"There is no need," replied Nina, and without even looking at him, she went on.

Thomas lingered about the spot, and in the Sabbath stillness he soon heard her loom at work again.

The young man could not wait till his wedding-day to know how it fared with Nina. On the Wednesday evening he stole into the island, and going round to the window of Nina's cottage, he looked in at her. She stood by the table, the beautiful girl who was to be his wife so soon. She was making up a bundle, into which she slipped something that glittered like gold, as it left her hand, and Thomas thought that it looked very like her chain. It was not for her beauty that he loved her, but yet how handsome she was! Never had he seen a face like hers, so witching, so soft, so fair, 'spite her dark eyes. Surely, it was something to have that charming face ever before him, all the days of his life! Suddenly Nina, leaving the table, went up to the window. In a moment Thomas had slipped round the cottage. He stayed a good while there watching the door. When he came back,

the window was black, and the lovely vision was gone. "It is not worth while going home," thought Thomas, so still watching the door, he walked about the island till the stars faded out of the sky and it grew rosy red in the blush of dawn. Just as the birds began to twitter, the cottage door opened, and Nina came out with her bundle in her hand. She crossed the plank; she left Manneville; she took the road to Fontaine; she walked on till she reached the wayside cross, then happening to look back she saw Thomas close behind her. He put no questions; he expressed no wonder; but he walked by her side as if they were bent on the same journey, and must needs take the same road. Nina walked on for a quarter of an hour, then suddenly stood still and, without a word, turned back towards Manneville. Thomas turned back too, merely saying:

"Let me carry your bundle, Nina."

She let him take it from her hand, and so they went back till they reached the

island. Without attempting to enter it with her, Thomas gave Nina her bundle again, and with a kindly good morning, he left her.

They were to be married on the Saturday. On the Friday afternoon Thomas went to Nina's cottage, and merely putting in his head at the door, he said briefly:

"Are you coming to confession, Nina?"

"Why should I?" asked Nina, turning round sharply.

"Because the curé will not marry us otherwise," shortly replied Thomas.

Nina pondered awhile, then said she would go to the church presently; but when Thomas said he would wait for her, she saw she could not get rid of him, and with an impatient frown, she walked out of the cottage.

"Lock the door, Nina," said Thomas.

"There is no need."

Thomas took out the key and put it in his pocket.

"Are you already master?" she asked.

"I am master in your house and you are mistress in mine, Nina."

Nina smiled scornfully. As they crossed the bridge, Thomas said carelessly, that as they were too early for the curé, perhaps Nina would come in and look at the house.

"Shall I not see it to-morrow?" said Nina.

"Do you see that window?" persisted Thomas. "Well, I used to stand there and wait to see you come out of the passée on the bridge; but now you will be in and not out, so I have had a platform made and your chair put up on it, that I may see you from the end of the bridge, when I come home of an evening."

Nina looked at him in wonder, then with a defiant laugh, she asked if he thought she should sit up there to be looked at?

"But when you do sit there I shall see you," he insisted composedly.

He was passing by the door of his own house, when Nina asked impatiently why

he did not open it? Thomas muttered something about all the people being out, then taking the key of the house-door out of his pocket, he put it into Nina's hand, saying:

"I have locked your door; open mine, Nina."

Nina smiled almost kindly as she opened the door of the house that was to be hers on the morrow. At once she turned into the parlour. It had all been scoured and scrubbed and beeswaxed, so that it shone again, and on the platform in the window stood an old arm-chair with a bright new red cushion. Nina, who looked at nothing else, went straight up to it, lightly climbed up the step, sat down in the chair, and thence looked down at Thomas, whose gladness sparkled in his eyes.

"You had that chair put here for me?" she said.

"Yes, Nina, for you!"

"What for?" she asked, as if she had forgotten.

"I have told you—to see you when I come home."

"Can that be true?" she exclaimed almost incredulously.

"Why not, Nina? I never liked anything half so well as to look at you."

Nina bent her dark eyes full upon his face. She found nothing there that belied his words. Neither spoke, but they looked at each other so till Nina turned away, and leaned back in the chair, pale as death.

"You are ill," cried Thomas, startled at a change so sudden.

She replied faintly that she was not ill, but she seemed in a strange sort of trance. Her left arm rested on one of the elbows of the arm-chair, her right hand supported her cheek, her eyes gazed out of the window like the eyes of one in a dream, then suddenly she started to her feet and asked if it were not time to go to the church. Her colour had come back and Nina looked herself again.

Thomas had a clear conscience and led a straight life; the curé had soon dismissed him with a blessing. But what

tale had Nina to tell that she was so long about it? Was there some dark secret in her past life, some unsuspected guilt or shame, that the little church had become quite grey when Nina rose at length, and came back to the bench where Thomas sat waiting? There were tears on her pale face, and her look shunned his piercing gaze, and her voice was faint and low as she whispered that she was ready. Thomas asked rather severely if she would not say a prayer first, and Nina, with unusual obedience, knelt down by his side and prayed as he bade her. Indeed, she prayed so long that Thomas had to tell her the sexton was waiting to close the church. They went out together after being reminded, under the porch, by the curé, who was going away too, that he would expect them early; and walking side by side, they went down the hill, passed by the house of Thomas, and crossed the bridge.

The moon was rising as they reached the passée. Her soft, pale light stole in

through the trees and fell across the path in broad patches. The evening was mild for the season of the year, but Nina walked very slowly by her lover's side, like one ill at ease; then suddenly she stood still and said she must sit down. There was a low, grassy bank close by. Thomas took her to it, and Nina sank, rather than sat at the root of a tree. He asked if he should bring her some water.

"No," she answered in a weak, low voice; "it will soon be over."

Thomas stood by her side and waited. The spot was lonely, the night was very still, only now and then could he hear the murmur of the little river gliding by. Suddenly there broke on this stillness a voice of lament that went to his very heart, for Nina was weeping bitterly. Every sob and moan she uttered thrilled him with a secret pain, yet he put no questions. At length she grew calmer, and wondering at his silence:

"You do not ask what ails me," she said, "perhaps you do not care to know,

and yet I must tell you, though——"

"Tell me nothing your husband should not hear, Nina," he interrupted sternly. "We are to be married to-morrow morning. I want to know nothing; let bygones be bygones. Such as you are, for better for worse, I take you, but tell me nothing. You have tried me much, I have borne it, but you see you might try me too much."

Nina was silent awhile, then she said very sadly: "I must tell you, though I know that this time you will hate me for it."

"Nina——"

"I must. It would kill me to keep it back; besides, I should tell it you all the same in the end. You had better know it before I am your wife."

"I suppose I must go through it," muttered Thomas, setting his teeth; "yet I would give something never to know what you have done, Nina."

"I have done nothing," sorrowfully said the girl, "but I have a bad, hard heart, and I have been ill-used, and when the

curé once bade me be patient under it, I scorned him and set my face against heaven! and all my misery I laid to your door, and so I thought, as you gave me the opportunity, that I would have my revenge."

"Well," said Thomas.

"I would lead you to our very marriage morning, and when I stood before the maire and the priest, and you had said 'yes' and taken me for your wife, I would say 'no,' and make you as great a byword among your people as you had ever made me."

This was not what Thomas had feared, yet it was a terrible blow. He could not speak at once; at length he said: "You really meant that, Nina?"

"Yes," she answered faintly, "I did. I thought to go away once, but you followed me and brought me back, and so I thought I would show you that you were not my master."

"When you went to the church with me this evening did you mean it, Nina?"

"Yes, I meant it till——" she paused.

"Till when, Nina?"

"It was in the house that my heart failed me," she said, without answering his question. "When I saw the chair you had put there for me, and I sat in it and looked out at the bridge, and thought how you had stood and looked out for me, day after day, loving me, though I hated you, and how sure you felt that I would become your wife on the morrow, and had put that chair there to see me as you came home, my heart failed me. My purpose seemed to die away from me; I tried to keep it fast, but I could not. The great love you bore was too much for my hate and scorn, and so it prevailed over me, and as I sat in the chair, I said to myself, 'I cannot do it—no, I cannot do it!'"

"Is that all, Nina?"

"Almost all. I told the curé all about it, and he bade me repent, and be a good wife to you. He did not bid me tell you this, but it had been too much for me, for as we came up the passée, you walking

by my side, suspecting nothing, I felt that I must die unless I told you, and now I have told you, and you can deal with me as you please, and if you like to scorn me to-morrow as I meant to scorn you, why you may, and so you will have your revenge."

She looked up at him in humble penitence. Thomas did not answer her at once; he was gazing down at her as she sat almost at his feet, with her hands clasped round her knees and her pale face, on which the moonlight fell, raised up to his as in the silent expectation of her sentence.

"And so," said Thomas sternly, "when I took you in my arms to-morrow week and kissed you, as an honest man may kiss the girl who is to be his wife—so all the time you meant to betray me with that kiss, as Judas betrayed his master."

Nina started to her feet, and raised her trembling hands to heaven. "As I have a Judge there," she said, "I did not mean it then."

"Then what did you mean?" Thomas asked, still sternly angry.

But Nina only flung herself on the earth, weeping aloud in the bitterness of her anguish.

"What did you mean?" he asked, without relenting. "I, like a fool, did think that I read something like love in those black eyes of yours, as I took you in my arms that evening, but if you had loved me then you could not have planned to betray me the next morning. No, Nina, you could not. True, you have confessed your sin—but that is remorse, no more."

Nina did not answer at once. When she spoke all she said was, "Deal with me as you like. I have deserved no mercy from you. But you told me once that I was no witch; well then, *you* are no sorcerer, Maître Thomas—no, you are not."

Thomas did not seem to understand this taunt, for all he said was, and he spoke rather drily. "Well, will you marry me to-morrow, Nina?"

"Yes," she answered in a low tone, "if you will have me."

"And will you, on leaving the church, go with me to my uncle's?"

"Yes" she answered again, "I will."

"And Nina, you will not work on Sundays now, you know."

"No. I will not."

"And you will say your prayers and go to church and be a good Christian, Nina?"

And Nina, as humble as she had been scornful, still said "Yes." Thomas then drily supposed it was all settled, whereupon Nina rose, and walked on. Thomas walked by her side and uttered never a word, till he handed her the key at the door of her cottage, and said "Good-night." Nina stood with the key in her hand, looking after him.

"Ah, I should not have told you!" she exclaimed, stung at his coldness, "for now you will hate me."

"Do you like me, Nina?" asked Thomas, half turning back.

"You know I do," said poor Nina,

"you know I have liked you since you said, 'Will you marry me, Nina?' I have striven hard against it because I have a bad, hard heart, but it has prevailed over me, and you know it."

"You have liked me seven days, Nina. Well, I have liked you seven years. So, perhaps, I am not going to leave off now. And yet you should not have told me! For suppose I were to treat you to-morrow as you meant to treat me! Wickedness often breeds wickedness, Nina! or worse still, suppose I were to marry you and take you to my uncle's, but instead of bringing you home to Manneville, drop you on the road, and cast you away. No law could make me live with you, Nina, and should I not have my revenge then?"

"Ah, indeed," said Nina, faintly.

"Well, let bygones be bygones," resumed Thomas. "Only be early to-morrow, Nina. My uncle lives a good way off."

"I shall be early," she answered, and so they parted. Early though the lovers were the next morning, all Manneville

was as early to see them married, and when they left the church man and wife —it was the organist who gave Nina away —all Manneville followed them out. Nina looked modest and lovely, and when Thomas lifted her up into the little car that was waiting for them at the church-gate, and sprang up by her side, he could not help looking both triumphant and happy.

"She has bewitched him," exclaimed Laure, as the car drove off.

The curé overheard the remark and smiled. "No, no, my good Laure," said he; "it is Thomas who has bewitched Nina."

"Well then, does he mean to starve her?" irrelevantly asked Laure, "that he takes her off without giving her a bit of breakfast."

But Thomas had no such intention. As they drove past the little wood on the road to Fontaine, he asked Nina, and it was the first time he had spoken, if she would not get down and have something

to eat. She said "yes;" so they alighted, and sitting down under the shade of the spreading tree, in the spot where he had once found her sleeping, they had their little meal there. The sun was high by this, and the air was warm. Some bees made a drowsy hum in the shady place, the very stamping of Thomas's horse, as he wandered about, grazing and whisking his tail at the flies, was enough to send one to sleep. Nina's nights had been very wakeful ones of late; besides, Thomas said never a word. She closed her weary eyes, she let her head sink on her bosom. In a moment, she scarcely knew how, Nina was fast asleep.

When she woke up, a long slanting sunbeam, stealing on the grass by her side, was her only companion. Thomas had vanished, the horse, and car, the very tokens of the recent meal were gone, Nina was quite alone.

Had Thomas fulfilled his half threat? Had he deserted his young wife on her wedding-day, and more than paid her out

for all her scorn? Whether such were Nina's thoughts or not she neither called on nor looked for her husband, but she clasped her hands round her knees and looked straight before her with sad, grave eyes. Presently she heard a step behind her, and the voice of Thomas asked cheerily if she had been long awake.

"Not long," quietly answered Nina. Something wrong about the car had obliged Thomas to take it to a farm behind the hill, and get it mended, and now, as time enough had been wasted, they resumed their journey.

What need is there to tell how the uncle of Thomas and the uncle's wife both liked Nina, what a wedding-feast there was, and what merry-making went on till Saturday came round again, and Thomas could take Nina home? As they drove past the wood, Thomas nodded towards it over his shoulder, and said: "Well, Nina, when you woke and found yourself alone there, what did you think?"

"I thought you would come back for

me," answered Nina, with a shy smile.

"I was close by all the time, Nina," whispered Thomas, and as he said it the last faint drop of bitterness that might have lingered in his heart died away from it and returned no more. But whether he had bewitched Nina or Nina had bewitched him, is an open question to this day in Manneville.

Sylvie's Vow.

THERE is an old truism concerning the folly of leaving one's own country in search of picturesque or beautiful places when they are to be found at home; which truism has the great fault of many such truisms: namely, that it is one-sided, and assumes, as granted, a doubtful fact. We do not go abroad to seek for what we can find at home. We do not go abroad for mountains or waterfalls, for forests or wild sea-side glimpses. We do not even hope, if we are sensible people, to gain by our

journey any deep insight into foreign manners, seeing that foreigners do not, as a rule, delight in the society of strangers. No; we travel for change, for that absolute change which, in its way, is rest. Thus the strange town, noisy, tumultuous, and hot though it may seem to its own denizens, is to the foreign visitor delightfully cool and refreshing. Cities, however, are quickly exhausted, and are then discovered to be mere stone or brick, as the case may be; but Nature has many wild nooks yet in store for us, and when we choose to visit her private haunts, we generally learn that man and his passions, prejudices, and feelings are, like the great mother, infinitely varied in aspect. Of course, our domestic or local customs and superstitions are, like our scenery—perfect. The only mischief is, that we know all, or almost all, about them. Abroad it is not so; all these, indeed, may be as old as the hills, but to us, at least, they wear a look of novelty.

That is the advantage of travelling.

The danger in remaining at home is, that we view the world as it is around us—not as reality would show it. We grow to be the very slaves of circumstance, and can rarely get beyond our surroundings. We are like those painters of the Renaissance who showed us the Flight in Egypt, in a soft Italian landscape, and made the Holy Family rest near a crystal fountain bubbling over its stone cup into the wider basin below, whilst a Cupid or a god Pan looked calmly down from his rustic shrine on the sainted Mother nursing her divine Child. Their desert of Egypt was a garden round an Italian villa, and being pervaded with Heathenism, they must needs paint nymphs, and fauns, and classic deities, whatever tale they told. Thus, no doubt, there are good people to whose imagination the whole world appears covered with brick cities, Elizabethan mansions, smooth lawns, and green parks.

To avoid this peril, I generally take my flight every year to some foreign spot. I am a quiet, shy old bachelor, and I travel

alone; but I protest that I have never failed to be rewarded for my journey by some aspect of scenery or some trait of character, I should not, I believe, have found at home. I make it a rule never to visit the same place twice, if I can help doing so; the consequence was, that not wishing to go far last year, and yet requiring sea air, I was rather puzzled whither to bend my steps, as the poets say. In this emergency I applied to Mrs. Berry. She looked at me and shook her head, and sighed, and seemed doubtful.

"Can you keep a secret?" she asked.

"Can I?" was my injured reply.

"Well, then, if you will solemnly promise never to mention the name of the place I shall mention to you—never, especially to those vagrant English, who are the pest of one's life, and who ruin whatever spot they visit, I will tell you of a quiet village on the French coast where you can spend a few weeks in the deepest peace."

I promised readily enough. I got every particular I wanted, and as Mrs. Berry is

decidedly a clever woman, though a sharp-tempered one, the information was clear, precise, and to the purpose.

"Mind you go to the Cheval Blanc," she said, by way of conclusion, "and tell the landlady I sent you. Deluded woman! she wept when I left: she wept with joy, thinking I was going to let her have a shipload of English next season, and she will consider your advent as the herald of her coming prosperity; and also please to ask if Sylvie is still living, and if she has looked at the sea since I was there last."

"Looked at the sea! Did you not say the inn stood on a rock, just above the sea?"

"Of course I did say it; but still put that question, if you please, and bring me the answer."

Now, I have a touch of inquisitiveness in my disposition, and Mrs. Berry, who knows it, only spoke thus to provoke me.

"There, you are in a precious fidget," she said triumphantly; "come, I will have mercy on you, and tell you what I know of Sylvie."

"I like the name, Mrs. Berry."

"That's nonsense!" coolly replied Mrs. Berry, in her supercilious way, "Sylvie is a red-cheeked, sturdy girl, and the cook at the Cheval Blanc—no more. Nevertheless, there is something in her, as you can learn, if you will but listen. I don't know what took me to the Cheval Blanc. A whim, I suppose, and an aversion to English society. There was certainly no fear of my meeting any there. I arrived late one evening. The night was dark and starless, and a strong north-westerly wind was blowing. I took it for granted that the village was delightfully picturesque, for I got a sad jolting to reach the inn, but I saw nothing of it. All I saw was the mass of cliffs looming above me. I heard a great roaring of waves dashing on a shingly beach, and through the heavy gloom I perceived a bright spot, like a fiery eye. It proceeded from the kitchen-hearth of the inn. The landlady came out to receive me. She was a plain, middle-aged woman, in a white cap with long

flaps to it, and with gold earrings, and a gold cross shining on her brown neck. She looked amazed enough when I alighted from the car. I learned afterwards that I was the the first woman whom the Cheval Blanc had ever seen. And yet the poor fellow dangling above the door and tossed by many a sea-breeze, had seen some company in his day. I crossed the kitchen, and did not much mind a man and woman in it. The landlady went upstairs to prepare a room for me, and, in the meanwhile, made me sit in a sort of pantry behind the kitchen. She concluded, I suppose, that I must, being a lady, also be unsociable and prefer solitude. I did not much like that pantry, with a lonely candle flaring in the wind, and the sea roaring sullenly without. Besides, I have gregarious propensities. I like to associate with my fellow-creatures and hear their voices. A good deal of talking went on in the kitchen between the couple I had seen there, and I was glad of it. The discourse could not be of

a private nature, so I saw no harm in keeping my door ajar and listening.

"'This a stormy night!" said the woman's voice, and a very scornful voice it was; 'not it.'

"'There will be a gale before the morning,' replied the man.

"This speaker had rather heavy and sullen tones. The woman answered him with a little short laugh, more scornful than her voice itself; then a great sound of something frying on the fire prevented me from hearing the rest, if anything else was, indeed, spoken between these two. I could not resist the temptation of peeping at them. I saw them very well, though they were too much intent on looking at each other to see me.

"The kitchen was an old-fashioned one, with a deep stone chimney, as large as many a modern room. The man sat in one corner of this recess. He was a sturdy young fellow, with a woollen cap and jacket, and a pair of huge boots, which told me his calling; this was a

fisherman. The woman stood holding the handle of a frying-pan. She was Sylvie, a strong-built girl, with red cheeks, harsh features, and a defiant look and carriage that struck me. She tossed up her omelet in the pan with a scornful air; then, when it was done—and, my dear sir, it looked deliciously brown—she went and put it on a dish, which she placed before the fisherman, with the look and attitude of a Medea handing the poisoned bowl to Theseus.

"'Not that you need be in such a hurry,' she said; 'there is a gale, and you will not go out to-night.'

"The young man put down his knife and fork, and looked at her. His features were tanned with exposure, but I was struck with the mild reproach of his blue eye; and dark as many a wintry gale and many a summer sun had made his cheek, I could see it reddening with something that seemed more like pain than resentment at the taunt. Harsh-featured though she was, this Sylvie was a woman. She

could not resist that look. She walked round his chair, put her arm around his neck, and softly kissed his cheek. I am not sure that he returned the caress. He did not, indeed, reject it, but he leaned his elbow on the table and rested his cheek on his hand, like one in pain, and all the while—so foolish are lovers—the omelet was getting cold.

"Sylvie, indeed, was the first to remember the fact. She kissed him again. I saw her sin had been a deep one; then pushed the plate nearer to him, and uttered an imperative 'Mangez donc.'

"Mr. Grant, a friend of mine, once assured me that man was made to obey woman; and he kindly added that, when he did not comply with that law of his nature, everything was at sixes and sevens. I dare not follow his conjecture thus far, but sure am I that Jean—so was the fisherman called—fulfilled the first part of Mr. Grant's proposition to the letter.

"He put by his dejected looks, took up

his knife and fork, and went through that delicious omelet, and a pound of bread, and a jugful of cyder, with the heartiest goodwill. Sylvie, though still busy about the kitchen, kept him in conversation. Her talk was, to me, very peculiar.

"'Do listen to it!—how it roars!' she said. It was plain she meant the sea by that scornful 'it.' 'One would think it is going to eat us all up—cliffs, village, church, and all!'

"This ironical speech was followed by another little short laugh, which seemed like a note of defiance to the Atlantic without.

"Jean took the part of the sea.

"'It gives us fish,' he said, 'and fish gives us money, and——'

"Sylvie stamped her foot at him, and shook her clenched hands, but not at him.

"'I hate it,' she stammered; 'I hate it.'

"This is a very extraordinary woman,' I thought; 'she evidently has a quarrel with the sea.'

"And still the placid Jean took the poor persecuted ocean's part.

"'God made it,' he said, 'and——'

"Sylvie would not let him go on.

"'He also made devils,' she interrupted; 'and I hate the devil, and I hate the sea.'

"She looked sullen and really angry now; but Jean was evidently a blunderer.

"'I know you were afraid of it once, and——'

"No speech of his was to be completed this evening.

"'Afraid!' she screamed, at the pitch of her shrill voice. 'I afraid of the sea! If I were a man I would ride over it. I would whip it,' she added, working herself up to a sort of rage, and unconscious, in her wrath, poor girl, that she was only a plagiarist of the Persian King.

"I cannot tell you how this girl began to interest me. I would not have lost a word of what followed for anything. However, I am not going to repeat all that passed between Sylvie and her lover.

The meaning and substance of it was, that Jean, though a fisherman, and evidently only waiting the turning of the tide to go off, stood in that calm, and yet deep dread of the sea which you find in the very bravest of his class; and that Sylvie, in her insolent defiance of the mighty element, looked upon such dread or awe—call it what you will—as a sort of cowardice, which she scorned. This feeling of her's she wanted Jean to share, and she became a very Circe in her endeavours to coax him out of his belief into her own. She praised him, she laughed at him, she was fond and sarcastic, and it availed her not. Jean smoked his pipe placidly, and heard her out, and when he had done, got up with a quiet 'Au revoir, Sylvie.'

"'Au revoir,' she answered, shortly; but she soon repented her unkindness. She followed him to the door, and lingered there awhile with him, then came back and sat in his vacant chair, looking as

dreamily at the embers on the hearth as any heroine in a novel.

"Presently the landlady of the Cheval Blanc came down, and informed me that my room was ready. On hearing her mistress, Sylvie had started up from her dream and busied herself about the kitchen. She was stooping over the fire as I passed on my way upstairs; her bent face looked flushed, and it seemed to me that this harsh defiant scorner of the sea had been crying.

"'You have a very strange girl,' I said to the landlady, as I got up to my room.

"'Strange! surely not. There is no one strange about the Cheval Blanc, thank Heaven!'

"'Oh! I do not mean unpleasantly strange; but she does so hate the sea.'

"'It would be strange if she did not, considering that the sea took from her father, brother, and betrothed, in one night.' So Jean was not a first love, poor fellow! That was why she snubbed him so.

"'I thought,' said I, 'that fine young fellow downstairs was Sylvie's sweetheart.'

"'So he is; but his elder brother was her betrothed. Jean had always liked Sylvie, however, and after the misfortune had happened, two years ago, he gradually persuaded her to listen to him, and they are to be married next winter!'

"Father, brother, and betrothed lost in one night! Here were blows enough to crush a woman; but this red-cheeked, stout-hearted Sylvie had not been conquered, not she! She had the spirit of a heroine, had that cook in a village inn. I admired her, and I said so. My landlady looked grave.

"'Sylvie was a first-rate cook. No one could equal her in an omelet aux fines herbes, and her onion-soup was like none other;' but the owner of the Cheval Blanc thought this open hatred of the sea a mere defiance of Providence. She did not admire it, not a bit.

"What was more, she was not very willing to talk about it. Perhaps she had

some superstitious dread lest the chastisement due to Sylvie's iniquity should be visited on the whole household; and though this apprehension was not sufficient to counterbalance the merits of Sylvie's omelet and onion-soup, it was strong enough, may be, to render her silent.

"The ignorant, unless they happen to be gifted with naturally strong and observant minds, care little for those peculiarities of character which do not affect daily life. Another girl, a sort of chambermaid, who came up when her mistress departed, proved equally impenetrable. Sylvie was a good girl, she said, and she must have her own way; it was dreadful to lose one's father, brother, and lover in one night—but then Jean was so good, and so forth. Beyond this I could not lead her; yet some glimmerings of Sylvie's past life I gathered from her. Jean's imputation had been a true one; Sylvie had been afraid of the sea, afraid and fond of it before her great calamity. She had loved

its grandeur and beauty, but she had never ventured more than once upon it. Sea-sickness had been her excuse; but fear, said Joséphine, had been her real reason. And now fear and love had turned to this deadly hate.

"My bed was a good one, as good a one as I ever slept on, but my eyes did not close once the whole of that night. The wind blew with a wild, desolate moan, and the sea beat at the foot of the cliff with a deafening voice; such a voice as you never hear save from the Atlantic in its fury. Towards morning the great din gradually lessened, and I fell into a slight doze. When I woke, Sylvie stood before me with a jug of warm water, which I had ordered the evening before for that hour.

"'What a night we have had!' I said.

"'Yes,' she replied carelessly; 'a rough night and strong wind.'

"'But it was the sea which made that terrible noise.'

"Sylvie did not answer. I was a stranger, and not to me would she pour

forth the story of her wrongs and of her hatred. I longed to question her, but dared not. That girl had suffered much, and sorrow is, or ought to be, a guard from all intrusive questioning. I dressed myself and went out. The village lay in a narrow cleft of the rocks behind me. Before me I saw the shingly beach, a long stretch of gray sea, with deep sharp ridges of white foam, a cloudy, tempestuous sky, and high up on the cliffs to my left a little church and churchyard. The tide was out; I wandered away among the briny rocks, whence the long seaweed had been torn by the angry waves; dead crabs and sea anemones floated in the shallow pools of sea water; everything had suffered from the night's tempest. I thought of the young fisherman, and wondered how he had fared. I had expressed some uneasiness on his account before I left the inn, but my landlady had replied, hurriedly, that there was no fear; that Jean and his companions had got out of the reach of the storm long before it began.

As Sylvie, whom I had not perceived when I spoke, then emerged from a dark corner of the kitchen, I did not know whether the reply was dictated by truth or by kindness.

"I never did like suspense in narrative. Of course, you know what is coming, because if it were not coming I should not have had this story to tell. As I was wandering among the rocks, thinking rather anxiously of the poor fellow, a shrill, wild cry, that was scarcely human, so desperate was its agony, was heard over the whole beach. I felt struck with horror. At first I saw nothing, for a sharp point of cliff stood between me and the spot whence that cry had proceeded. I hurried on, I saw a group, I joined it. There lay Jean himself, and bending above him there was Sylvie, ashy white, and after uttering that wild cry, silent as death. The men in woollen caps and jackets around me spoke. Jean's boat must have been caught almost by the first wave when he went out, and at once dashed to pieces. Not a board, not an

atom of it, but had been carried away by the waves; but, as if the angry sea wanted to answer Sylvie's defiance with another defiance more deadly than any she could hurl at it, it had, after ruthlessly playing with the corpse of her lover, like a tiger with its prey, cast it aloft on a ledge of rock, and left it there beyond the reach of the surge; a memorial both of its power and of its vengeance.

"I looked at the poor girl. How could she survive such a moment as this? But she did survive it, and what is more, that new agony did not conquer her. She looked up from her lover's dead body. At once the talking around her ceased; save for the distant moaning of the still angry sea and the sudden cry of a sea-gull over our heads—all was still. Sylvie clenched her hands; she fastened her burning eyes on the moving gray line which was receding from us, and in a low voice she uttered the following words, or if you like to call them so, imprecations.

"'Oh! you cruel, greedy, devouring

sea! Never—never, till I die, shall my eyes rest upon you again! Never—never!'

"She rose and walked away. This was Sylvie's vengeance. She had been conquered by her enemy, she knew; and yet she could not confess it; but that her foe might not be for ever taunting her with her defeat; that in storm it might not remind her of this night's cruel work; that in sunshine and fair weather it might not seem to say: 'Such I could have been for you, and such I would not be:' Sylvie vowed never to gaze on it again till she died."

"You do not mean to say she kept that vow?" I here remarked.

"I mean to say," replied Mrs. Berry, "that whilst I stayed at the Cheval Blanc she kept that vow. She followed her lover to his grave in the little churchyard up on the hill, whence the sea is visible on every side, and she never once raised her eyes from the ground. She came home, she resumed her duties in the kitchen after a day or two, and still she would not look

at her enemy. The position of the Cheval Blanc required constant vigilance, but that vigilance Sylvie exercised. I watched her very keenly and very closely; others watched her too, but no one ever found Sylvie in fault. She had her enemies, and I know that some of them were cruel enough to come to the inn to ensnare her into breaking her vow, but Sylvie foiled them all. Nay, more, I believe, this girl never once mentioned the word 'sea,' after her great woe. Night and day she heard it moan around her dwelling; from morning till night, she had but to raise her eyes in order to see it; but Sylvie was dumb as well as blind, as far as the sea was concerned. She ignored it utterly. There lay a great and deep grief buried under that silence, I have no doubt. As the ocean waves pass calmly over many a lost mariner, so Sylvie's quiet bearing only served to conceal many a dead hope within. Life was over for her now. She had loved twice, and her last venture had not fared better than the first. Sylvie

was not the woman to have a third love. That vow of hers was the seal—the gravestone, if you like—of her youth. I do not mean to say that she doated on Jean. My belief is, she cared very little for him; but, perhaps, because she loved him less, she felt a remorse from which her first bereavement had been free. She had urged him on to his destruction. He might have sailed that night even if she had not spoken; but if she had said a word to detain him, he would have stayed. Everyone in the village said so, and to me Sylvie seemed to be ever brooding over the dreary remembrance of a great sin. Thus her vow was half atonement and half revenge."

I like character. It is a remnant of the uncivilized times, which vanishes daily, and gets as rare and precious as an old coin. Mrs. Berry's account of this stern, vindictive woman and her vow interested me; and I do believe that, if I had not already been determined to go to the Cheval Blanc, Sylvie would have taken

me thither. The incidents of my journey were few and uninteresting, and I reached France, the province, and finally, the little sea-side fishing-town, or village, where the Cheval Blanc and Sylvie were to be found, in safety. When I saw this wild place, buried in the crags—a sort of human eyrie, with the sullen Atlantic for ever beating against the rude cliffs 'midst which it is built—it seemed to me that Sylvie's case and the hatred of her enemy, lost their strangeness. This was the very place for a haughty heart to rebel against those stern and pitiless powers of nature which are ever crushing us with ruthless might, scorning our sorrows and our tears as things of no worth. But how did Sylvie manage not to look at the sea? That puzzled me strangely. It was visible from every house, it seemed to me, and when I reached the Cheval Blanc, I doubted if one of the windows of that dwelling could claim exemption from a sea-view. Wherever I turned, I saw a broad blue line meeting a paler blue sky.

The landlady came out to receive me. Great were her transports when I said that Mrs. Berry had sent me. Here, alas! or rather, here luckily, was no heroic sternness of character, but a plain, candid love of lucre. How she expatiated on the merits of the place! How sure she was that it could eclipse in time, and of course, with due patronage, all the upstart, worthless, cheating places along the coast. None of them, she solemnly assured me, could compare with this.

"And Sylvie," I said, at length thrusting in a word, "has she looked at the sea?"

I spoke low, for, though a pale, sickly woman stood in the kitchen, and I thought that this was not Sylvie, I did not wish to be overheard. The landlady looked a little confused, and winked two or three times very rapidly, whilst the woman raising her downcast eyes, stared at me. That stern, sorrowful look, full of reproach, and not without a sort of angry dignity, told me that this pale, worn creature, who looked fifty if she looked a day, was Mrs.

Berry's red-cheeked, stoutly-made servant-girl. I felt ashamed and vexed, and I left the room without saying another word. The landlady followed me out, and was quite voluble and communicative.

"Yes, that is poor Sylvie," she said, with a sigh; "she is dying, says the doctor—heart-complaint, but nothing will make her give in; nothing. She will go on working."

"And she has never looked at the sea?"

"Oh! never. She would die rather than look at it. She is not right there, you know," and Madame tapped her forehead. Ay, there it is; unless you are like your neighbour, "you are not right there." Why, *I* have been told that *I* am not right there! I say it is my neighbour who is wrong in that important part, and who shall prove that it is I!

With feelings rather provoked with that foolish landlady, I dismissed her a little shortly, after ordering a dinner, which the fated hands of Sylvie were to prepare.

Up it came ere long; onion-soup such

as I had never tasted, an omelet such as I had not imagined in my dreams, were amongst the items. Sylvie was an admirable cook. Yes; this woman, worthy to be the daughter of the Atridæ, so far as the mere power of hating went, understood cookery in all its niceties. She was a born genius in an art where professors are many and geniuses are rare. If she had brought up the meal herself, I should have proposed to her to leave the Cheval Blanc and come to my inland home. No danger of the sea there, but I dare say that even if, forgetting her complaint, I had been so foolish as to make this proposal, Sylvie would have declined it. Of course she would. She did not want to forget the sea, not she; she wanted to hear it, to remember it constantly, and to hate it on.

I saw very little of her during the first week of my stay. My indiscreet questions had put Sylvie on her guard, and whenever I came near the kitchen, she vanished into its deepest and darkest re-

cess. Every afternoon I went out. As I passed by the kitchen one day, I saw that Sylvie was not there. In her stead Joséphine attended to the cooking. I asked if Sylvie was ill.

"Very ill," she replied, emphatically, "but she would go all the same."

"Go where?" I naturally inquired.

"To the churchyard. She is having Jean taken up from his grave, to put him beside his brother and her father. Her brother was never found."

Here, then, was an opportunity of seeing Sylvie. I climbed up the hill to the churchyard, a poor little place, with many hillocks, a few black wooden crosses, and not one stone slab. The sky was dark and threatening, the far sea was black as ink, the closed church looked lone and gray; very mournful was the aspect of everything around me. The ceremony, if ceremony it could be called, was half over when I arrived. Four men, wearing scapulars, and belonging to a brotherhood that binds itself to such duties, had taken up the coffin, and were bearing it

to another grave at the end of the churchyard. A woman in a black cloak, with the hood drawn over her head and face—this is a sign of mourning—followed them slowly. Suddenly one of the dark clouds over us broke, and it began to rain heavily. Sylvie stopped, unfastened her cloak, and, with a strange look of tenderness in her sunken eyes, she flung it over the bare coffin, so that the rain should not reach it. Oh! Jean, if you had not been loved in life, you surely were loved in death! The men hastened on. The coffin was quickly lowered into the grave, the earth shovelled in, and Sylvie stood by till she was drenched. I took shelter under the church-porch. When all was over she passed by me with her wet cloak on her arm, and her eyes bent on the earth. I heard her say to one of the brethren:

"You are sure there is room for another coffin?"

"Yes, yes, plenty of room," he answered a little roughly; he was a fisherman, I believe, and not much used to

gentle speech. "There is not so much of you now," he added.

Poor Sylvie! There was not much of her, indeed, nor did that little last long.

Her exposure to the rain may have served to hasten her inevitable end. Three days after this, Joséphine burst into tears as she laid the cloth for my dinner. Sylvie had had a fainting fit, and been taken to her room, and the doctor had said that she was dying. I could believe it. I had caught a glimpse of Sylvie that morning, and if ever death were written on a human face, it was written upon hers. The girl left me, but I let my dinner get cold. Through the open window I saw a smiling blue sea. "Poor Sylvie," I thought, "your enemy, as you call it, was too much for you, after all. It broke your heart, and what does it care for your poor human anger! Better have looked at it, Sylvie, and blessed the Hand that chasteneth in its mercy, than have hated the poor unconscious instrument of your woe."

When I went out for my walk on the beach, after dinner, I asked how Sylvie was. The landlady shook her head; "Sylvie was very bad indeed."

What was this girl to me, that her fate should make me sad? And yet it did. We all, if the truth were known, have played and lost in the great game of life. Some lose love, and some lose health, and some —worst fate of all—lose innocence. So, whatever our loss may be, we are sure to be akin if we will but look back on the past. In my youth I too had had a story, very different from this Sylvie's, but still a sad story enough, and I too had ventured and lost. So my heart yearned, whether I liked it or no, to this poor fellow-sufferer of mine. Wherever I turned, I still thought of her. On that ledge of rock Jean had been found. His grave lay up there on the hill; I had seen it this very morning, with a faded wreath of garden flowers placed upon it by a hand that would soon be nerveless and still; and, as there is no interest like the human inter-

est, I looked carelessly at the glorious sunset I had come out to see. Purple clouds, on which the sun rode like a conqueror, waves of molten gold or liquid emerald, all the splendour and pageantry of nature were nothing to me then, nothing so much as the mystery of a stern, though obscure, woman's heart. Would Sylvie look at the sea as she had said she would, when she was dying? Above all, would she forgive it, or would she die with the stain of that unchristian wrath on her soul?

When I went back to the inn, I found Joséphine crying in the kitchen.

"Is Sylvie dead?" I asked, struck with the solemn silence of the house.

"No," she sobbed, "but they are going to undo the shutters."

This requires explanation. When Sylvie took her vow, she caused the shutters in her room to be nailed up, for as her window faced the sea she would not trust any of the usual fastenings. A gust of wind might open them and betray her. And

now Sylvie, knowing that her hour was at hand, had asked for her shutters to be undone, that she might see her enemy before she died, I suppose. I knew where her room was. Often had that sternly-closed window, when I saw it outside, told me the story of a mind darkened by affliction with the blackness of a voluntary night. I stole upstairs very softly; Sylvie's door was open, a group stood around the chair in which she sat propped up by pillows. How ghastly pale she looked in the gray light. No one spoke, but a man on a ladder outside was already hammering and wrenching out the nails which fastened the shutters. Every blow of his tools sounded to me like a knell. How sure Sylvie must be that she was dying. Presently the last fastening gave way, the two shutters were slowly folded back, and the open window framed a divine picture: a beetling crag, a vastness of blue sky, a glowing horizon, and the infinite expanse of a deep azure sea breaking softly on a quiet shore. Sylvie started

up; her pale cheeks flushed; she clasped her hands; she gave the sea she had so loved, so feared, so hated, a long passionate look; then, without uttering one word, she sank back and died.

"Well, Joséphine," I said to the girl, the next morning, "did Sylvie forgive the sea, do you think?"

"Sylvie died like a Christian, Monsieur," rather tartly answered the girl, "and Christians must forgive their enemies."

"Very true; but did Sylvie forgive that enemy?"

"I do not know, Monsieur; it was her business, not mine," drily retorted Joséphine; "besides," she thoughtfully added, "if she did hate the sea, poor thing, it was as we hate, or ought to hate, the Evil One, you know."

Was it so? Was Sylvie's a moral hate, if I may so speak, misplaced and mistaken in its object, but not unjustifiable in its source? To say the truth, reader,

I fear not. I fear there were dark depths in that woman's soul, depths which she herself had never sounded. I fear that hers was not the abhorrence of evil, but the rebellion of a stern pride against pitiless strength. I fear it, but remembering the deep religious faith of her race, I also hope that she repented of her sin, and that Heaven has had mercy on one who suffered much, and died of her grief.

They buried her the next day near Jean. There she sleeps, with the waves ever breaking and roaring at the foot of the cliff, on which stands the little church with its dead around it.

Cousin Jane.

WHEN my little cousin, Jane Lumley, came to me one morning, and said in her blushing way, "Cousin William, Mr. Forbes has proposed to me, and I have accepted him," I felt that I must be a very old cousin indeed, a very safe cousin as girls would say, or she would never have chosen me for a confidant.

I was pleased, and I was sorry to hear the tidings. I was pleased because it was a very good offer, and I was sorry because Mr. Forbes would take Jane away—selfish

animal!—and though I had never cared to marry her myself, I thought it a hard case to see her marry another. However, as pleasure had come first, so it was the predominant feeling, and I shook hands with Jane, and congratulated her on her good fortune. For it was good fortune; decidedly so. Mr. Forbes, though a widower, was not thirty; he was good-looking and accomplished; he was well off too, and had a charming home within a convenient distance of London; in short, he was a most eligible husband for Jane, who had not a farthing of her own, and who owed the very clothes she wore to my father's kindness. Not that he thought it much kindness, dear old boy. Jane was his pet, and I feel pretty sure that he considered Mr. Forbes a very fortunate man in having secured her. Of course, I thought so too, for I knew Jane's value. Still, Mr. Forbes's offer puzzled me.

Jane had come with her little story to me in the garden; we were alone in one of the green arbours. She stood in the

shade, bareheaded, modest, with a happy blush on her cheek, and a soft dewy light in her brown eyes. I had never seen her look half so well in her whole life as she looked then—and, shall I say it?—Jane did not look at all pretty! No, not at all. No one, indeed, could call Jane ugly or even plain; but there was an absence of beauty in her face which was the more remarkable that pretty girls abounded in ——shire. She had a nice figure, a graceful carriage, a pleasant voice, and a happy look; that she had, and no more. She was also a sensible girl, clever, and well-bred, and amiable, though dreadfully shy with strangers; but how could Mr. Forbes know anything of Jane save her shyness? He had not seen her more than a dozen times in all, and Jane was so quiet that he must be a very penetrating and far-seeing man indeed, if he had discovered her merits during those brief interviews. I ventured on expressing some surprise. "How sly you both have been, Jenny," I said.

"No, William, not at all sly, I assure you," she replied gravely. "I had no idea Mr. Forbes thought of such a thing till he mentioned it the other day."

"Then you did not say 'yes' at once, Jenny?"

"How could I? I was so confused that I should not even have asked for time to think over it, if he had not made the suggestion."

It was very plain that Jane was not in love; but then how odd if he was. I had seen them together the day before this, and Mr. Forbes, for a young man, was a cool lover, to say the least of it. Spite her inexperience in such matters, Jane felt some surprise too, and she expressed it with a mixture of sauciness and simplicity which she often displayed with me, but which she had certainly never showed to Mr. Forbes.

"Do you know, Cousin William," she said, looking up at me, "I must be a very fascinating person after all. I am not pretty, I am twenty-three, I am not rich,

I am quiet, and yet Mr. Forbes, who has only to pick and choose, is smitten with me."

"How do you know he is smitten?" I inquired.

I repented the question at once; but, luckily, Jane only laughed.

"Why should he want to marry me if he were not smitten?" she asked, gaily.

"Ah! to be sure. And you are smitten, of course, Jenny?"

"No," was her rather serious reply. "I admire Mr. Forbes, and I am grateful for his affection; but though I hope to be very happy with him, I am not what is called in love, Cousin William. That is not in my way, I suppose."

And Jenny just uttered a little tremulous sigh of regret, and looked like an ancient maiden who bids adieu to love and its follies, but who, though conscious of her wisdom, feels rather mournful to be so very wise. These little fanciful ways and conceits, which tempered her good sense, and made it endurable—for mere good

sense is apt to be dreadfully oppressive—were Jane's real fascinations, in my opinion. I could understand that a man should be allured by them; but they were never displayed unless in intimacy, and Mr. Forbes could know nothing about them. Still he must be smitten, as Jane said; for why else should he wish to marry her?

If hurry be a proof of love, Mr. Forbes was very much in love indeed. He wanted to marry Jane offhand; and when my Aunt Mary, who kept house for us, remonstrated a little indignantly, Mr. Forbes showed some temper. He submitted, however, and the courtship went on. I could not help seeing a good deal of it, and I did not like what I saw. Jane, silly child, seemed quite happy with such attentions as Mr. Forbes paid to her; but if she was satisfied, I was not. Mr. Forbes went through love-making most conscientiously; but I remembered my flirtation with Grace Anley seven years before, and I thought it was something very different from that.

I never caught Mr. Forbes giving Jane any of those looks which had made me so dreadfully ridiculous in those days; I never saw him raised to bliss or sunk to despair by anything my little cousin said or did; and what was very significant, I never once saw him try to be alone with her. I drew the pitiless conclusion that Mr. Forbes, though one of the cleverest men I knew, had nothing to say to Jane.

I was alone with her on the evening before the wedding-day. We sat in the parlour, by one of the open windows, and we looked out at the garden. I could not help thinking that this garden would seem very dull and lonely when my little Cousin Jenny was gone. No more should I hear her gaily carolling in the morning, as she ran down the alleys, light and blithe as a bird on the wing. No more should I see her reading in one of the arbours as intent as a young muse. No more should the waving of her muslin dress or the pattering of her little feet on the gravel give me pleasant thoughts of youth and girlhood.

She was going off to Paris with that cold Mr. Forbes, and after their honeymoon trip he would take her to his house and keep her there for ever. These were dismal thoughts; so, with a groan, I said:

"You are going away to-morrow, Jane?"

"Yes," she answered, in a low voice. "Do you know, I can scarcely believe it, Cousin William."

"Nonsense," I said, a little crossly. "You like it. I have no doubt you are desperately in love with Mr. Forbes by this."

"No, I am not," she replied, with one of her little solemn ways; "it is very odd, but I am not in love with Mr. Forbes, spite of all his devotion to me."

Mr. Forbes's settlements had been very liberal indeed, but other devotion I had not seen in him.

"It is very wrong," continued poor Jenny, in a tone of keen remorse; "but it is no fault of mine, you know. Nevertheless, I spoke to Mr. Forbes about it the other day."

"Did you though?" I exclaimed, rather startled at this unnecessary piece of candour.

"Yes; and he said it did not matter, and that we should be very happy together, and that I would be, he knew, a good mother to his little boy."

Jane's simplicity and Mr. Forbes's coolness both confounded me. It was plain he was no more in love with Jane than she was with him; only, why on earth did he want to marry her? How did he know that she would make a good mother to his little boy? Jane had no sort of experience concerning children, and was not even very fond of them. She liked them, to be sure; but I had never seen her go baby mad, like Grace Anley. Mischievous little flirt, she knew it became her, I suppose. Well, well! I have had my revenge. I saw Grace the other day—she is now Mrs. Grant—and Grace, my nymph, my sylph, has grown stout.

I don't exactly know what reply I gave little Jane; I dare say some truism about

the non-necessity of ardent love on her part, for she said, in her serious way:

"So I think, Cousin William; besides, you know, feeling that deficiency, I must, of course, make it up by being ever so much better than I might have been if I had returned all Mr. Forbes's feelings."

But she sighed; perhaps the prospect of being so very good seemed a little austere to my young cousin. Aunt Mary came in and put an end to the conversation. I went out to smoke a cigar, and did not see Jane till the next morning.

A pleasant blushing bride my cousin looked, almost pretty, and quite happy. Mr. Forbes was, as usual, very handsome; a little pale, perhaps, but I am bound to say that he went through the trying marriage ceremony with manly fortitude. When it was over, he seemed to have cast a weight of care away, and he accepted our congratulations and good wishes with something like a happy smile. The wedding breakfast was late, and I did not see much of him before we all sat down;

but, when we did so, I thought Mr. Forbes looked a very excitable bridegroom, and that even quiet little Jane had very fitful spirits for a bride. I saw it, but drew no conclusions till Jane entered the library, where I stood alone, to bid me good-bye. We had spent many pleasant hours in that library, and I did not wonder that Jane showed some emotion on finding me there. But when she came up to me, and, instead of taking my hand, threw her arms around my neck and laid her cold cheek to mine, and burst into sobs and tears, I did feel a wonder verging on alarm.

"Jane, my dear girl, my darling, what ails you?" I said, anxiously.

"I am going away," she sobbed; "oh, Cousin William, I am going away!"

She would tell me no more. She was going away, but surely she had known it all along; and surely it was not to go and leave us that could put her in such a state of despair as this. Well, I could get no explanation from her; in the first place, because she would give me none; in the

second, because there was no time. The carriage was waiting; they were looking for her.

"I am coming—I am coming," she cried, darting from me and speaking in a light-hearted voice. I followed her out. Mr. Forbes handed her into the carriage, stepped in after her, and my little Cousin Jane, now Mrs. Forbes, was gone for ever from amongst us.

Jane had not been long married when my father died. Aunt Mary was ordered to the south of France, and I remained alone with the housekeeper. These were dreary days. I wished now I had proposed to Jane, and married her; I fancied we should have made a happier couple than Mr. and Mrs. Forbes. She wrote now and then; she never complained, to be sure, but she never once said, "I am happy." She praised Mr. Forbes and his house, and spoke of her position and her comforts—of herself never. The theme that most frequently recurred in her letters was Arthur, Mr. Forbes's little boy. She

recorded his sayings and doings with evident fondness, and I began to think that a young bride whose mind was so much engrossed by her husband's child could not be a very happy one. I had received a general invitation to Mr. Forbes's house, and though Jane did not once remind me of it, I resolved to visit the Elms. It would be a change; besides I wanted to see why Jane was not happy. I am bound to say that, though my visit was unexpected, Mr. Forbes received me very cordially.

"Jane will be delighted to see you," he said; "she is out with my little boy."

Jane came in presently with a sickly peevish-looking little fellow—the wonderful Arthur, about whom she had so much to write. She coloured on seeing me, but delight in her face I saw not. If I could have believed it of Jane, I should have thought that she was sorry I had come. She stammered a welcome, however, but, as I soon perceived, shunned every opportunity of remaining alone with me. Once I caught her on the staircase.

"Well, Jane, are you happy?" I whispered.

"Oh, quite happy," she replied airily. "Is not the Elms a charming place?" And she made her escape.

Yes, the Elms was a charming place: a brown old house, spacious and convenient, with a gay flower-garden around it, and beyond this a region of ancient elm-trees scattered on a grassy slope. Truly the mistress of this pleasant abode and well-ordered household, the wife of that handsome, agreeable gentleman, ought to have been a happy woman; but she was not. I saw it at once. Jane had grown thin and pale, and looked sad and careworn. Nor did Mr. Forbes look a happy man. I did not like the rigid lines which a few months had made in his handsome face. He was very kind to his wife, and strictly polite; but of fondness, of love, of tenderness, I saw no sign. He kept these for his child, who was certainly one of the most ill-tempered little three-year-old wretches I had ever seen. Yet Jane

seemed to rival her husband in doating affection for that little monkey, who began our acquaintance by making faces at me, and followed it up by biting my leg before dinner. "He was a great sufferer," apologetically said his father.

I thought I was the sufferer in this particular instance, but I bore the pain—I have the mark to this day—with that heroism which politeness alone can inspire. I did not intend paying Mr. Forbes and his wife a long visit; but our intentions have little power over the course of events. That same evening I took a walk with Forbes, stumbled over the root of a tree, and sprained my ankle. It was very provoking. My sprain was one of the worst; the doctor who was called in ordered rest —total rest, he said. In short, I was condemned to spend many days, some weeks, perhaps, at the Elms. Mr. Forbes behaved unexceptionably; he was cordial, he was kind, he was hospitable; and my little Jane, on seeing me in severe pain, became once more my dear little Jane of

old times. She was a good deal with me —I mean alone with me. Her husband had business in London, and went there daily; and whilst I lay stretched on a sofa in the parlour, Jane sat and worked and watched Arthur and his maid out in the garden. "Jane," I said to her one day, after biding my time, "why are you not happy?"

Jane became crimson, and I saw her little fingers tremble as she vainly tried to threadle her needle.

"I—I am very happy," she stammered.

"No, Jane, you are not; nor is Mr. Forbes. I do not want to meddle between you; but yet, Jane, if a word of sound sensible advice from Cousin William would help to set matters right, why not give yourself the chance, and him the pleasure, of that word?" Her colour came and went; her work dropped on her lap; she clasped her hands and said:

"Oh! if you could—if you could tell me something—advise me, I mean. Oh! Cousin William, if you could make my husband like me!"

"I always suspected this," I replied rather ruefully; "but, child, I must know why he married you. Do you know?"

"Oh! yes," she answered in a very peculiar tone; "and that is just the mischief. If I had known nothing, all might have been well."

This was very mysterious, and it took me some time, and gave me some trouble, to make Jenny more explicit; at length, perhaps to please me, perhaps to relieve her poor overcharged heart, she told me all.

"You remember my wedding day, Cousin William. Well, I felt very happy that morning. I was resolved to be so good and so devoted, and to make up for not loving Mr. Forbes so much as he, no doubt, loved me. When we were really married and I came home his wife, and looked at him and felt proud of him, I was happy. Oh! so happy. Perhaps you remember that, even before changing my dress, I went down the garden. I had a foolish fancy to gather some of my

favourite flowers and take them with me. I thought to be alone there; but some one had given Mr. Forbes a letter on our coming in, and he had gone to the garden to read it. I saw him in the summer-house sitting in your chair, his head flung on the table, his arms clasped above it; and I heard him groaning as if he were in great agony. I turned cold and trembled. I knew it was no physical pang that wrung these moans from him. The letter he had been reading was on the ground by him. I picked it up and stood with it in my hand, looking at him. He had not heard, and he did not heed me. I looked just at the first words; and when I had read these, I could not leave off till I had finished the whole letter. God help me! It was a love-letter, written to my husband by one who had been compelled to betray him; but who, at the eleventh hour, repented her error, and asked to be forgiven! She wrote full of hope and fondness. She had suffered so much that he could not, she said, be long

angry with his own Annie! Yes, she called herself his own. I was his wife; I had not been an hour wedded; I still wore my white dress, my veil, and my orange-wreath, and another woman wrote thus to my husband! He now roused himself and saw me. I still held the letter in my hand, and my face, no doubt, told him that I had read it; for he took it from me and walked away—both without a word. I wondered how he felt. Was he sorry the letter had not come sooner? would he have given me up even at the foot of the altar? I know better now—I know Mr. Forbes could not be dishonourable; but then my mind was not my own. One thing, however, was clear. He did not love me. He had wished to marry me in order to punish the ingrate, and to hurry our marriage in order to forestall hers and show her how little he felt her faithlessness. He had taken me poor, plain, and unattractive, that I might owe him much, and he, the rich, handsome gentleman, owe me very little. That was

it, and, Cousin William, it was very bitter.

"You know now why we are not, and cannot be happy. It is because I read that letter. I am like Psyche, and, like her, I pay for my error. If I had remained ignorant, I should have been content. Mr. Forbes would have acted his part to the end, and to the end I should have thought that I had fascinated him. But my poor little pride has had a fall, and little Cousin Jane has been sorely humbled. She knows, what you knew all along, that she was never loved, but merely made the instrument of an angry lover's revenge. Still, I must be just to him. I am sure he meant to make me very happy—to be generous, kind, and attentive, and perhaps, in the end, he would have liked me, Only, you see, now he cannot. I know too much. As he is in your presence, so he is in private—a perfect gentleman. If I wished for a silk dress every day, he would give me one; but he cannot pretend to love me, and I can do nothing to please him. I, who

meant to be so good, so devoted, so dutiful even, I never find a word to say to my husband. I answer when he speaks, and that is all. I am cold as a statue when he is by. I feel it, I know it, and I cannot help it: that Annie is ever between us, and she freezes me. I have never seen her; I do not know who she is, what she is like; but sometimes I lie awake at night and think, 'If he were to find me dead tomorrow, would he be very sorry he could marry his Annie?' "

Poor little Jane! My heart ached for her, and it ached all the more that I fancied she was fond of her husband. "Jenny—Jenny," said I, with a sigh, "I will tell you why you can do nothing to win Mr. Forbes; it is because you like him."

She hid her face in her hands, and I saw her forehead, her neck even, turned crimson.

"Yes, that is it," she said at length, looking up and turning pale again. "I like him—I who reproached myself for not

caring enough about him when we married—I who meant to try so hard to get that liking. I like him. He does not see it—he never will see it; but if he should, I shall be the most wretched of women. It is the thought of my indifference that reconciles him to his lot; if he knew the truth, he would find it unendurable."

"How do you know that?" I asked, much startled.

"I cannot tell you, but I know it. I nearly betrayed myself once; how, does not matter, but I cannot forget his look of uneasiness and alarm."

"Jane, you slander your husband."

"No," she replied, quietly, "and you must not misunderstand me and wrong him. I am quiet, you know; well, I believe that Mr. Forbes took me partly for that. 'Here is a girl who will expect no devotion, no fondness, no nonsense,' he thought, 'nothing, at least, that I cannot give her.' Suppose he finds out that I am not the woman he thought me, and that when I married I did expect to love

and be loved; do you not understand that it will be misery to him to try and fulfil his part of the compact?"

Alas! that was very true, and because it was true I heaved a deep sigh. At that moment the parlour door opened, and Arthur came in. At once he crept up to his young stepmother. She took him on her knee, and twining his arms around her neck, he nestled on her bosom and thence looked at me with a pale, pitiful little face that made me forgive him all his sins. If these two had not the beauty of the group in Raphael's Madonna della Siggiola, they had the tender pathos of that immortal picture. I wondered as I looked at them that painters give us no more holy mothers and divine children. They say the subject is exhausted; but we cannot exhaust humanity, and she has not a more lovely image than that of a child in a woman's arms.

"Jane," I said, and I am not ashamed to add that my eyes were dim, "there is your hope and your link with the father."

Jane shook her head rather sadly.

"No link," she replied, "but, if possible, a cause of further division. When I came and found this poor sickly thing, my heart yearned towards it, perhaps because it suffered like myself; perhaps," she added, with a faint blush, "because it was his. I called it, and it came; I caressed it, and it fell asleep in my arms. When it was sick, I tended it; when it was peevish and fretful through pain, I bore with it; and thus, I suppose, it loved me. But, you see, it loves me too much. One who ought to be first is second now, and second far away. I am obeyed when another is not heeded; I am sought when another is left, and I am not his that the preference should not be resented; not against me, indeed, not against the child, but resented as a wrong. For if there be a being passionately loved, it is this little pale face. His mother died when he was born, and his father almost became a woman for his sake. He nursed him, he tended him, and I reap the sweet fruit of

love—I, who had not the care of the tree. But I cannot help it. This is my comfort in sadness; this little warm living creature clinging to me, and I cannot give it up. When I talk to it and play with it, when I dress it, as I like to do daily, I feel almost happy. Arthur is not always cross as you have seen him, Cousin William; Arthur does not always bite, for Arthur is not always in pain, poor little fellow. He has days when he is bright, and merry, and frolicsome, without mischief, just like a young kid. Eh, Arthur?"

Arthur looked up, she stooped and their lips met in a long fond kiss. They were thus when Mr. Forbes entered the room. I saw his colour change as he perceived the child in his wife's arms, but he soon recovered his composure, came up to us cheerfully, and bending over Jane's shoulder asked Arthur to kiss papa. Arthur frowned, and gave papa a sulky push. Mr. Forbes tried to smile as he walked away, but the smile was forced,

though a blush which followed it was real. We are none of us perfect, and I am bound to say that as Arthur pushed his father away, a saucy little look of triumph passed through Jane's brown eyes, a look that to me, at least, said very plainly: "I am not Annie; but some one can love me, Mr. Forbes;" and it was this look which, whether he understood it or not, made Mr. Forbes colour like a girl. Poor little Arthur, I wonder whether that look led to what followed.

Nothing is easier than to solicit confidence under pretence of giving advice, nothing more troublesome, to a conscientious person, than to give the proffered counsel when the confidence has been made. So, at least, I now felt, and I dreaded being alone with Jane again; but I found, to my great comfort, though not without some mortification, that Jane had spoken to get relief, not to be advised. At least, she never asked me to suggest what line of conduct she should pursue towards her husband, and I believe she

even forgot that anything of the kind had been mentioned between us. I pitied her from my heart, but I saw no remedy to her sorrows. I pitied Mr. Forbes, too. You see, it is one thing to marry a woman with the intention of giving and receiving affectionate regard, and it is another thing to marry a girl who takes the liberty of falling in love with you, and who feels aggrieved if you do not, or rather cannot, follow her example. What should I have done, for instance, if, marrying Jane for the sake of being comfortable with her, I had suddenly discovered that my saucy little cousin was enamoured of poor me? It has occurred to me since then that Jane would not so have committed herself with me, but, at the time, I did not think of that. I rejoiced that I had not proposed to her, and I pitied her husband; for if Jane's misfortune was to have read the letter, his trouble was to read her heart rather too truly. Poor little simple Jane! it was like her to think that she could keep such a secret from a husband, who had not love to blind him.

I watched him without seeming to do so, and I felt sure that Mr. Forbes's grief was to see his wife's love and not be able to return it; his grief was to have married a quiet and, as he thought, a sensible mercenary girl, and to find out that he was wedded to a fond and tender-hearted woman. I do not mean to say that he resented that love, or that it bored him; but he could not return it, and that surely was a very hard case. Of course, if she had not read the letter he would have tried to deceive her, and Jane was such a little goose that it would have been the easiest thing in the world; but she had read it, and, I suppose, Mr. Forbes was one of the men who act but cannot utter lies, for I do not think that he ever made the attempt to cheat his wife into any such belief.

I was beginning to walk about with the help of a stick, when I saw Mr. Forbes go off in his chaise one morning with Arthur.

"Please to tell Jane that I am taking the child," he said to me.

On hearing this, Arthur, who had sat quietly till then, uttered a scream of dismay, and called on his "mamma." I saw Mr. Forbes bite his lip, but he drove away all the faster, and, spite Arthur's shrieks, both father and child were out of sight in a few moments. Jane had heard the noise, and now came down rather scared. On hearing the explanation I gave her, she turned very pale.

"Oh, why does he take him to Harting?" she cried piteously; "my maid has just told me the small-pox is there. Oh, if one could only overtake him!"

That was out of the question, so I did my best to comfort Jane; but the tears stood in her eyes as she still kept sighing.

"Oh! why did he take him?"

Why, indeed? The child came home bright and well, and his father seemed quite triumphant at having kept him half a day away from his step-mother.

"And not at all unhappy, Jane," he said, with marked emphasis.

All day the child continued well and

merry, but the next morning he felt sick, and by the time his father came home at night he was ill. In a week it proved to be the small-pox. It was I who told Mr. Forbes. He turned dreadfully pale; he had learned that the epidemic was at Harting. It was there, and he had taken his child to it; he had taken him to illness, perhaps to death, just to brave and teaze his poor young wife! I knew all this passed in his mind, for the first words he uttered were,

"God forgive me!"

His next remark was a question.

"Has Jane ever had it?"

"Never," I replied, gravely.

"Then she must not stay with him," he said, quickly; "she must not."

He went up; I followed him to the nursery. Jane was there bending over the little cot, with Arthur's hand in hers. Mr. Forbes went up to her; he was much agitated. He could scarcely speak.

"Jane," he said, without looking at the child, "you must not stay. I know you

have never had this complaint—you must not stay."

"Would you say that if I were his mother?" she asked.

"You have no right to risk your life," he urged. "I have had it, so has your cousin." I am dreadfully pock-marked, reader. "We risk nothing; you risk much."

"What?" asked Jane, and my pale, sad-faced little cousin became for a while a glowing and almost a beautiful woman; "what do I risk? Life! It is not so dear, Mr. Forbes. Disfigurement! What change for the worse would that make in my lot?"

Mr. Forbes said not a word.

"I have had that child's love," continued Jane, looking back towards the cot, "and nothing, nothing shall make me leave him!"

No more was said. Arthur moaned as he lay, and Jane sat on one side of him and her husband on the other.

Three days they sat thus. Three days

the little sufferer lingered. On the fourth, an angel called him and released him from his pain. I was present when he died. That poor peevish little fellow had become so patient and so meek in his illness that I, too, had begun to love him. My heart smote me when I saw his eyelids flutter strangely, and his pale lips quiver, and his little face—it was neither blotched nor altered—take the strange calmness of death. Jane wept silently; Mr. Forbes was tearless, and sat looking on like one turned to stone. At first he seemed incredulous, but at length he understood that it was all over. I do not think he saw me; if he did, he forgot me. He turned to his wife.

"Jane," he said.

She looked, and did not move.

"Jane, come to me."

She rose, and went and sat on the couch by his side. With a sudden moan, in which love, remorse, and pain seemed to mingle, he drew her towards him. He laid his head on that kind bosom where

his child's head had so often rested. It had been the refuge of all little Arthur's troubles, and it now received the strong man's passion of grief. Jane flung her arms around her husband's neck and mingled her tears with his, and whilst they wept together, the young and innocent dead slept on and smiled divinely, with closed eyes, at that fair world, without sorrow, passion, or pain, which it had just entered.

I softly stole away, feeling that out of the saddest grief good may come. Long after this, Jane said to me:

"Cousin William, my husband gave me his heart in that hour, and he has never taken it back again."

"And never will, little Jane: for if there be a fondly loved wife, you are that woman."

Jane had the small-pox, but her husband nursed her through it, and she recovered quickly, and was not at all disfigured. Happy Jane! I saw her the other day when I called at the Elms on

my way to London. What a bright old house it looked now that Jane was loved and happy! How proud Mr. Forbes seemed of his wife and of their only child, a beautiful boy very like him—need I say his name is Arthur? Well, do you know, fond though she evidently was of him, I doubted if Jane loved this Arthur quite so much as she had loved the other, and I told her so.

"The first Arthur," she replied, "was the child of my sorrow; the second Arthur is the child of my happiness. Both could not be dear after the same fashion. Besides, the other Arthur loved me best, and this one prefers his father."

"And Annie?" I suggested; "what about her?"

"I neither know nor care," replied Jane, with superb indifference. "The dead Arthur makes me feel secure in the past, and with the living Arthur I can defy a dozen Annies."

Dear little Jane! She was just the same little goose as ever. It was like her

to think that her hold on her husband depended on a dead or on a living child. Mr. Forbes knew better. In the fulness of his happiness, he told me the whole story about "Annie," as he drove me to the station. Of course, he did not tell me who "Annie" was; but he had seen her again at a party, and he could not help saying:

"Cousin William, you cannot imagine what I felt when I compared these two women—my dear, pretty Jane" (pretty Jane! oh, love, love!) "and that cold, shallow, frivolous woman! My darling felt me shudder as we left, and she thought I was cold. Cold! I was thinking—I could actually have married that woman!"

The Countess's Story.

"MY dear Sir, you know nothing about it," said the Countess.

I know it is very improper to begin a story in this fashion; but if I were to tell you, reader, how I knew the Countess, and especially how the argument which she closed in this peremptory manner began, it would take us both too much time, and leave my story just as it is now; still waiting to be told.

"My dear Madam," I replied, mildly.

"No, and ten times no," she interrupted,

with her brightest smile; and though she was not young, oh! how bright those smiles of the French Countess could be, and how they took one back to the days when those soft dark eyes of hers had made the sunshine of many a foolish heart.

"No," she said, with a little sigh; "love, a sort of love, is common enough, but adoration is rare. To my knowledge, I have been adored but once. You fancy, perhaps, it was when I was presented to Marie Antoinette and was pronounced the beauty of the day; you imagine it was later, when I appeared at the Imperial court, in the full maturity of my charms, to use Imperial phraseology. My dear Sir, nothing of the kind. Look at that picture up there; it is my portrait by Greuze, when I was nine years of age. Well then, about the time that picture was painted I was adored."

"By whom?" I asked, point blank.

She was silent a while, then she put a question in her turn.

"How do you like that face?" she said.

She looked at a portrait by Velasquez. I saw the fair-haired semblance of a Spaniard in black velvet, with his hand on the hilt of his sword. A pale, mild face this was, yet manly and serene, with great nobleness of expression.

"You do not mean to say that you were adored by that gentleman," I remarked rather sceptically.

"Of course not. We were not cotemporaries; but I was adored by one singularly like him, and I bought the portrait for his sake. I am fond of pictures."

She need not have told me that. The boudoir in which we sat was full of them. Some she had inherited, some she had purchased; they were all first-rate. It was a pleasure to sit with this bright old lady, who had been so lovely, and to look at a glorious Claude, taking you to fairy-land, with a hazy mysterious sunset, or to wander with Watteau's shepherds and shepherdesses in the fairest and coolest of Arcadian landscapes. These two masters

were her favourites. I knew she was all wrong. I knew, too, that if she liked the one she ought to have detested the other; but I am not bound to justify or explain her taste. I simply state it. The Countess had a ready tongue, and could find plenty to say for herself on this and indeed on any subject.

"I like Claude," she told me once, "because I never saw any landscapes like his; and I like Watteau because he gives me the men and women of my youth in an allegory. I do not care about nature in pictures or in books. It wearies me there, and delights me out of either."

"And you do not much care for figures," I replied. "You have no sacred or historical pictures."

"No; they crowd a room so. I hate to have faces staring at me from the walls."

"And yet you have two, my dear Countess—that divine little Greuze and that noble Velasquez."

"That divine little Greuze is your

humble servant," she said, with a smile; "and Velasquez is a very fine one—Aden Juan something or other."

The Greuze was indeed divine. It showed a child's face resting on its pillow, and looking at you with beautiful dark eyes. It showed that, and no more. But what a face! how sweet, how calm, how fair! It was scarcely childish, so strange was its beauty. It was somewhat pale, for it had been taken in sickness; but, I repeat, it was divine.

"And so you were like that when you were adored by that fine Velasquez?" I now said wishing to lead her on.

"Yes; a pretty child, as you see," she carelessly replied.

"But, my dear Madam, how did you know Velasquez, and how did Velasquez know you?"

"In the first place, his name was not Velasquez, but Pierre; in the second, you will not understand why he adored me, and how I knew it, if I do not tell you a long story."

"My dear Countess," I said, confidentially, "you know you want to tell me that story, and you know I am longing to hear it."

"Very true," she replied, laughing frankly; "well, then, here it is. I am slightly lame, as you know. I was born so. The defect was held to be incurable till I was nine; then my parents heard of a man who worked wonderful cures somewhere in Normandy; and, after hesitating a long time, they sent me down to one of my aunts, who resided in the province. You must know, lest you should wonder at some of the particulars in my narrative, that in those days surgical skill was powerless over many an enemy it has since conquered, and you need not be surprised that my parents, who were wealthy and intelligent, acted as they did. My aunt lived in a dingy old town; I would rather not mention its name, even to you. It was a very picturesque and ancient place, with wooden houses that projected over the streets, and seemed to nod at each

other in a friendly way. I speak of it as I saw it when I left it for ever; with the sunset rays streaming down its narrow streets, and a strip of blue sky appearing high above the dark roofs and gable ends; but very different was its first aspect to me. We arrived at night; the postchaise rattled through silent lanes that were black as ink, the postilion wound his horn with a loud unearthly music, and if my father had not been by me I believe I should have fancied we were going straight down to some dark land of enchantment. We drew up on a narrow irregular place. A bright moon hung in the sky above it, and lit it well. I saw a gothic church, all carving and niches, with saints' images in them; near it a large stately building, the Palais de Justice, as I was told later; and near that again a gloomy stone mansion, with a few red lights burning behind its crimson curtains. This was my aunt's house. My father carried me in—I could not walk—and my aunt—she was my great-aunt in reality—stood at the head

of the staircase to receive us. She was a very grave, solemn-looking lady, dressed in stiff silk brocade that spread wide around her. I felt frightened of her the moment I saw her, and that feeling of awe did not leave me whilst I remained beneath her roof. My father commended me to my aunt's care, promised in my name that I would be very, very good and obedient; and as he had an appointment at court, and could not stay with us, he took his leave at once, kissed my aunt's hand, bade me good-bye, and entered the post-chaise, which drove off with a great clatter and rattling of wheels. Again the postilion wound his horn, and again I felt as if the blast had magic in it. I was an enchanted princess, and this gloomy old house was my palace. Truly it proved so; for six months, not till my father came to take me away for ever, did I cross its threshold.

"I do not know that I was a very observant child, but some words which my father had spoken as he was leaving, and

which seemed to refer to me, had struck and perplexed me. 'Never alone,' he had said very significantly; and in the same tone my aunt had replied, 'Never alone.' Her manner implied, indeed, that my father's recommendation was a very unnecessary one; but the event proved its wisdom and also its uselessness.

"I did not like my aunt's house. It was large, cold and gloomy. I did not like my room, with its lofty ceiling and tomb-like bed, and its three deep windows looking out on the Place, and facing the solemn Gothic church. But I dearly liked my aunt's garden. It was large, and it had tall trees, and marble vases, and white statues, and plashing fountains; and when I think of it, it seems to me that never since have I seen such a fairy place. I dare say there are plenty like it still, but yet I do not know. A garden in the heart of a crowded city is rare, and my aunt's was a green and blooming oasis in the great stone desert around it.

"My aunt's maid Marie carried me

down to it the next morning. How I remember the blue sky, the young spring green on the trees, the fragrant flowers, and above all the summer-house to which Marie took me! It was built like a little circular white temple, with a flat roof, and supported by slender columns. It was a temple, I am afraid, and a heathen one; for within it, on a marble pedestal, stood a statue of Cupid bending his bow. I was placed on a couch facing the little god, and Marie said to me:

"'Will you be afraid if I leave you?'

"I was not a cowardly child. I said I should not be afraid, and she went, promising to return quickly. I had been reared in a city, taken out for drives in a carriage; but I had never been in a spot like this: truly it was enchantment! Around the temple grew some old acacia trees. I saw their light waving shadow on the sunlit path; their delicious fragrance filled the air; and the grass was white with their fallen blossoms. A little farther away I beheld the waters of a

fountain glancing in the sun; beyond it, I caught a glimpse of a white statue; and, to make it all more delicious, a blackbird began to sing as bird surely never sang out of a fairy tale."

"My dear Countess," I interrupted, "the Prince is coming."

"'The Prince,' she said, wistfully. "Ah! well, well—let it be. I had scarcely been five minutes alone when Marie came back, with a young man. I need not describe him: this Velasquez was his prototype. His dress, however, was of sober black cloth, very plain, yet deriving elegance from the carriage of the wearer. Child as I was, I could see that. I also saw that this young stranger wore no powdered wig—nothing but his own fair hair. Marie was not an amiable woman. In the shortest and most ungracious speech, she informed me that Monsieur Pierre was very clever; that it was hoped he could cure me; and that for this he must see my lame foot. I made no objection. My foot was stripped for

his inspection; he knelt on the floor to see it better, and after handling and examining it carefully, he sighed and looked up at me.

"'Can you bear pain?' he asked, in a voice so sweet and low that it was like music.

"'Oh! no, no,' I cried, much alarmed.

"'Then I cannot cure you,' he resumed, 'for to cure you I must make you suffer.'

"I shed bitter tears; but I wanted to be cured, to walk and run like other children, and dance like a young lady; so I consented.

"'Will Mademoiselle forgive me before I begin?' he asked with much humility. He was still kneeling. Our eyes met. My friend, you would never forget that look if you had once seen it. You would never forget the mixture of sorrow and shame and pride which was to be read in those dark grey eyes, so soft and yet so penetrating.

"'I forgive you,' I cried, very much frightened; 'but ah! do not hurt me, Monsieur Pierre.'

"Alas! he could not help hurting me. My shrieks filled the garden, and when he ceased and I lay on my couch, still quivering with pain, he was pale as death, and thick drops of perspiration stood on his brow. His was a mental agony, keener by far than that which I endured; but I was too childish to know that then.

"'Monsieur Pierre is tender-hearted, sarcastically said Marie.

"He was leaning against the white wall, his arms were folded, his eyes were downcast. He raised them and gave her a proud, sorrowful, reproachful look; but all he answered was, 'I am tender-hearted, Mademoiselle.'

"Marie tightened her lips, and was mute. And now he knelt again on the floor by me, for he had to bind up my foot. He could not avoid hurting me a little as he did so, but every time I moaned with pain he looked at me so pitifully that I could not help forgiving him. I told him so after my own fashion.

"'I like you all the same, Monsieur Pierre,' I said.

"He looked at me with an odd sort of wonder, as if I spoke a language he did not understand: then he smiled very sweetly.

"'Have you done?' harshly asked Marie.

"He mildly and gravely answered that he had, and he left the summer-house.

"'Good-bye, Monsieur Pierre,' I cried after him, but he did not answer me. Marie went with him. When she came back, I asked why she had left me again. She shortly replied that she had let Monsieur Pierre out by the garden door, for that his way home lay along a lane that ran at the back of my aunt's mansion. The business of the day was now over, and I was carried in to my gloomy room, where I amused myself as well as I could with a few toys and Marie's society.

"I thought I had done with Monsieur Pierre; but when at the end of a week Marie carried me down to the summer-house, I trembled with terror. The morning was lovely, the garden was more beautiful than ever; but the dread of pain

was on me, and conquered every other feeling. Marie again left me alone, and again came back with Monsieur Pierre. I screamed when I saw him, and hid my face in my hands.

"'Oh! you are going to hurt me—to hurt me,' I cried. 'Oh! do not, Monsieur Pierre.'

"'I shall not hurt you so much this time,' answered his sad low voice.

"'What need you tell Mademoiselle that you shall hurt her at all?' angrily exclaimed Marie.

"'I cannot lie,' he said gently; 'but I shall not hurt her very much.'

"I withdrew my hands and looked at him. The tender pity in his face almost drove away my fears. He had said that he would not hurt me very much, and I believed him. He knelt down by me and asked humbly if he might begin. I shook with terror, but I said Yes. He hurt me more than I had expected, more than he had expected himself, and I was angry.

"'You are bad, you are cruel,' I sobbed

when he had done, 'and I hate you.' He was still kneeling by me, tying up my poor wounded foot. I felt his hands tremble, and I saw his lips quiver.

"'No, I do not hate you,' I cried remorsefully. 'I like you, Monsieur Pierre.'

"'Hold your tongue,' sharply said Marie.

"This settled the matter, I vowed that I loved Monsieur Pierre, who was trying to cure me. Marie was very angry; but Monsieur Pierre, who was silently tying up my foot, stooped a little as if to secure the bandage better, and in so doing touched with his lips the poor limb he had been torturing. Marie saw and guessed nothing, and you may be sure I did not tell her the liberty my kind doctor had taken. She let him out again by the garden door, and again he left without bidding me good-bye. He came several times; each time he hurt me less than the last. His attendance upon me always took place in the summer-house in Marie's presence. It seemed that he could not

enter the house; for I was once a whole fortnight without seeing him, on account of the constant rain we had then. And now, my friend, I come to the point of my story. That young man loved me. He loved me—not as I have been loved since those far days; but with a worship, an adoration, a fervent respect, no woman has a right to expect, and which no woman in a thousand, no, nor in ten thousand, ever receives. Do not tell me that a young man of his years could not love a child of mine. Love is not always born of hope. There is a love so pure that it can live on its own flame and wish for no more. This is the love before the fall, if I may venture to call it so—the love which needs not beauty to call it forth, which has no visions of wedded bliss, which is independent of age or time. Yet it is a love which, spite its perfect innocence, is wholly distinct from friendship, since it can only be felt by man for woman, or by woman for man. I was but a child to others, a

pretty one, I believe, but still a child; but I was womanhood to Monsieur Pierre, ay, and womanhood in all its dignity, I have no doubt. Memory has since told me a story I was then too young to read. I now understand the language of his reverent looks, and I can guess the meaning of his silent admiration. That he was my slave I saw even then; that I could have made him do anything I pleased, that he suffered agonies when he was obliged to hurt me, I also knew. Now power is sweet, and I should have dearly liked to rule my new subject; but Marie would not allow it. When I spoke to him she would not let him answer me, when I asked him to gather me a flower or help to lift me up, or render me any trifling service, she forestalled him, and he let her do it with a grave and resigned air—the air of a man who is powerless in the hands of a cruel fate. And so the summer passed, and I was almost well when my aunt fell ill. Marie was too much engaged with her mistress to attend to me

now. She gave me up to the care of her niece Louise, a good-natured and faithful, but very foolish handmaiden.

"The first time that Louise took me down to the summer-house for Monsieur Pierre to attend upon me as usual, I discovered that she was by no means so strict as her aunt. I spoke to Monsieur Pierre, and she did not prevent him from answering, which he did briefly enough. I asked him to help me to sit up on my couch, and Louise took it as a matter of course that he should comply with my request. Monsieur Pierre propped me up with a pillow, as I had asked, and if it had been a divinity who had acquired such an office from him, he could not have gone through it with a deeper show of respect. The next time he came, he was a little more familiar, and the third—we were alone for the first and last time—Louise had dropped her work in the garden, and went to look for it whilst Monsieur Pierre was tying up my foot. She found the gardener on her way, and for-

getting all about me, I suppose, she stayed and chattered with him, and so, as I said, we were alone. He went on with his office and never looked at me; but I was not a shy child, and I was bent on improving this opportunity.

"'Monsieur Pierre, shall I soon be well?' I asked.

"'Very soon, I hope,' he answered.

"'And do you think I shall really be able to dance, I mean like my elder sister, and wear a white dress and flowers?' He looked up at me. I tell you I was not a child in his eyes. I have no doubt he saw me as my fancy had pictured myself—a maiden attired in white, with flowers in my hair.

"You will look like an angel,' he murmured. Poor fellow! he must have been very far gone indeed if he could think such a little mischievous monkey as I was like an angel. I was charmed with the compliment, however, and as I was really grateful to him besides, I exclaimed in the ardour of my thankfulness:

"'Monsieur Pierre, what shall I give you for having cured me?'

"He shook his head in grave denial. He had been paid for his trouble; he wanted nothing. Now, lest you should wonder at what follows, allow me to tell you that I had been reading a story in which the heroine, a duke's daughter, having been saved from certain death by a peasant's son, embraced him in the presence of the whole ducal court. I had thought this act of condescension very charming, and conceiving the distance between Monsieur Pierre and myself fully as great as that between the young peasant and the duke's daughter, I said magnanimously:

"'Monsieur Pierre, I shall embrace you.' He was still kneeling by me, and I half sat up, reclining against a heap of pillows. There was scarcely any distance between us; I had only to stoop a little to kiss his cheek, but my lips never touched it. He looked at me for a moment in silent rapture, as if I had been

an angel indeed coming down from heaven with a divine message of love; then he started to his feet and exclaimed:

"'Kiss me! I would die rather than let you.'

"This was so unlike my story, in which the peasant's son fainted with joy at the honour conferred upon him, that I was cut to the heart. Nothing, moreover, could be more offensive than Monsieur Pierre's manner as he stood leaning against the wall of the summer-house, his brows knit, his face stern and scornful, and his arms folded across his breast, looking very much as I had seen him look on that day when Marie had taxed him with being tender-hearted. I was vexed and angry, and in my mortification I cried:

"'You are very rude, Monsieur Pierre, and so saying I burst into tears.

"In a moment he was on his knees by me, begging of me to forgive him. 'Oh! wretch, miserable wretch that I am,' he said, 'is it possible that I make your tears

flow? But oh! what a wretch I should have been indeed to have let you do it, Mademoiselle! Surely no baseness would have been equal to that!'

"I never had seen, and never saw again, any one look as he looked when he spoke thus. Put if you can an expression of mingled worship and sorrow on the face of that Spanish knight before us, and imagine the countenance of Monsieur Pierre as he thus addressed me. It was well for me that I was but a child, else such adoration must surely have turned my head. A few years later I could not think of it without retrospective emotion; but all I said to him then was a saucy taunting:

"'Why did you kiss my foot, then? for you know you did.'

"He turned crimson, and answered rather bitterly:

"'Even a dog could do that.'

"I felt silenced. I was ashamed to have reproached him with that act of grateful humility. I was ashamed of myself alto-

gether, and wished Louise would come back. But she did not return. Monsieur Pierre was silent, and I spoke no more. Whilst he went on bandaging my foot I looked at the bright glimpse which I saw through the open door of the summer-house. The trees were turning yellow, and wore all their autumn's beauty; but the grass was green as in the spring, the fountains danced merrily in the sun, and the white statue beyond it, a fleet Atalanta stooping to pick up the golden fruit of the Hesperidæ, was to me as a promise of life and strength. How I remember that morning and the breeze that stirred the sere foliage of the elm-trees, and the low voice of the fountain, and a blackbird silent now that hopped on the grass, and Monsieur Pierre's bowed head and fair hair as he stooped to secure the last bandage on my foot. Never more was I to see that sunlit garden; never more was I to visit that little white temple; never more was I to feel the touch of the kind and skilful hand which had almost cured

me. Providence denied that its work should be completed, and left me with that lameness which I shall carry to the grave.

"Louise had been gone about a quarter of an hour, when she at length came back to us. She looked horror-struck.

"'Oh! Monsieur Pierre,' she cried; 'the man they have been trying at the Palais de Justice is condemned, and must die; so says the gardener.'

"He raised his head. Oh, my friend! his face was livid—it was frightful. Never shall I forget the horror in his eyes and parted lips—never. I screamed with terror, but my voice had no power on him now; he sank back with a groan, and fainted. Louise was beside herself. She ran to the fountain, and came back with a cupful of water, which she sprinkled on his face. It revived him; but return to life only brought with it the fiercest despair I had ever witnessed. He dashed his face on the stone floor, and uttered a prayer I have never forgotten: 'My God!' he asked, 'let me die before that man—let me die first.'

"'Monsieur Pierre, you must go,' cried Louise. 'Make haste and go, or I shall be ruined and undone.'

"But he did not go at her bidding.

"'You are one of God's angels,' he said, turning to me, 'and your prayers must be heard. Pray that I may die before that man.'

"'No, no!' I cried, bursting into tears; 'I cannot pray that you may die.'

"'Well, then,' he entreated, 'pray that he may live.'

"I was willing enough to do that, and I said so. He grew wonderfully calm, and rose, pale as death, indeed, but composed and grave. The change in him was so marked and sudden that I have often thought, since then, he must have received some inward certainty of the deliverance that lay before him. Louise hurried him away, let him out, and came back to me, all anxiety at securing my silence concerning what had passed. I promised to be mute, but I asked to know the cause of Monsieur Pierre's distress,

and I was so pertinacious that she was obliged to satisfy me. The man whom they were going to execute on the very Place beneath our windows was Monsieur Pierre's brother! I had never been so shocked, so horrified, and indeed so grieved. Poor Monsieur Pierre! well might he be broken-hearted.

"'The last execution took place a year ago,' said Louise, 'and then we all went to the country for the day; but Madame is ill now, and cannot be removed. I suppose we shall shut up the windows and stay in the garden.'

"There is a deep attraction in the horrible. I shivered with terror, and yet I longed to see that frightful sight. I wondered what it was like, and when it would be; but Louise could not or would not give me any information on either head, and I was left to my imagination. Heaven knows the images with which it was peopled then. They took so strong a hold of me, that never since those far days have I been able to read or hear of an execution.

I once attempted to do the one, and was seized with a shivering fit that lasted hours; and a gentleman having another time persisted in making such a narrative in my presence, I fainted before its close. The reality is surely fearful; but I doubt if it can equal the pictures my fancy drew for the three days that followed the scene in the garden. My aunt was dying, and I was left very much alone in my gloomy chamber. Marie never came near me now, and Louise was always going down to gossip in the kitchen. It rained heavily, too, so I could not be taken to the garden. I lay on a couch near one of the windows, reading Monsieur Berguin's stories, or looking out on the Place. The church opposite looked gloomy and dingy in the rain; it seemed to me that the saints must be very cold in their cold niches. The whole place was melancholy and lonely, and I was tired of seeing the great pools of water in which the rain-drops fell, splash, splash, without ever ceasing. But that was not all. An imaginary scaffold

was ever before me. I saw the block, and the axe, and the criminal, and the hideous executioner; and so vivid was the vision, that when I closed my eyes I saw it still. It followed me in my dreams, harrowing me with a mortal dread, and on the third night it woke me.

"A strong red light from the Place entered my room through its three windows, fell on the polished oak floor, and rose to the ceiling. It was not the light of day, and I knew it. A dull sound of hammering broke the silence of the night, and I knew that these were not the sounds of daily life. 'Louise!' I called, 'Louise!' But Louise had left me—I was alone. I could walk a little now, shivering with fear; but supported by a curiosity stronger even that fear, I crept out of bed and reached the window. I opened it softly and looked out. A pale mist almost hid the church from me; behind it, above a house which stood next it, I saw some grey streaks in the sky. Dawn was breaking, but the men who worked below had

torches, and their glare it was that I had seen from my bed. They were erecting the scaffold, I knew it at once, and I looked with eager eyes that vainly strove to pierce the darkness. Something black I saw, and shapes that looked like spectres in the red glow of the torches, but no more. I could hear, however, and I heard one of the men swearing at another who had taken his hammer.

"'Do not swear,' said a voice I knew. 'You do not know when you may stand in God's presence.'

"One of the men suddenly moved his torch. Its light fell on the face of the speaker, and I saw him standing on the scaffold, pale, grave, but composed, giving orders, which the men obeyed. How did I know that Monsieur Pierre could not be the criminal's brother? How did I know the frightful duty which brought him there, and would bring him there again and again, till death should release him? I cannot tell you that now, but I knew it then; my hair seemed to stand on end, my blood

turned cold with horror. I uttered a frightful shriek and I fainted.

"When I recovered consciousness, I had been ill a fortnight, my aunt was dead, and my father was sitting by me. I did not remember at once all that had passed, and my first words were,

"'Where is Monsieur Pierre?'

"'Monsieur Pierre is dead,' gravely answered my father. He did not live to cure you, but you must remember him in your prayers. I have already caused masses to be said for the repose of his soul.'

"Ay, Monsieur Pierre was dead. Heaven had heard his prayer. An hour before that appointed for the execution, he was seized with so violent a fever, that he was incapable of performing his office, and he actually died before another executioner could be found to end the days of the miserable criminal. All this my father told me, very briefly but very plainly, and he did well; it took away from me the horror with which I must otherwise have remembered that unhappy young man.

Death is the great absolver, and holds in his fleshless hand both oblivion and forgiveness. Death is the great deliverer, too; he has the keys of liberty, and unlocks its gates without an effort. My father was not my aunt's heir; we left her house as soon as I could travel, and Monsieur Pierre's name was no more mentioned in my hearing. But I did not forget him. I prayed for him, I remembered him, I blessed him for the good he had done me and had not lived to finish, and years later I succeeded in learning the whole of his sad story. I had it from a priest, who little guessed all that Monsieur Pierre's name recalled to me. He had known him from his childhood, and spoke of him with reverence and pity.

"'It had pleased God,' said the abbé, 'to bestow on this young man, the son of an ignoble, a blood-stained race, two of his choicest gifts; a noble heart and a handsome person. How did he come by them? He was unlike either of his parents, and neither in mind nor in person did any

of his brothers and sisters resemble him. There is a tradition in his native city that, two hundred years ago, a gentleman of good and honourable parentage was driven, by a crime he had committed, to accept the post of common executioner, and that from him this young man was descended. I have often wondered whether the nobleness, the truth, the manly gifts I saw in him, were derived from some remote ancestor—some Bayard of ancient chivalry, who lived fearless and stainless. There are streams which hide in the earth, flow in darkness for miles, then come forth again in sweet and pure waters. Is it so with man? Do certain virtues and attributes lie dormant for generations, to appear once more in some favoured descendant? Is this why the noblest stems often bear such foul fruit, and the fairest flowers are seen to blossom amongst evil weeds? God knows. It is a great mystery; but though you will scarcely believe me, Madam, this young man was all I say: a Christian hero. He had been accustomed, from his

youth upwards, to contemplate the hard fate to which he was destined, and he made no effort to avoid it. He was poor, and burdened with his father's children by a second marriage. Society was closed against him, and escape by concealment to one of such integrity that he never could deceive, never tell a lie, was impossible. He was deeply religious, and he resolved to stay where Providence had placed him. He would rather bear his fate in the face of all, and brave abhorrence or contempt, than seek some strange spot, pass himself off for that which he was not, and live in daily torment of expected discovery. He tried to consider himself as the blameless instrument of human justice, innocent as the axe he was to wield; but though his was a nature of great strength, the event proved that he had over-estimated its powers. His father had been dead a year when he was first called upon to exercise his office. He lived in such seclusion, that he did not even know a criminal was being tried for his life, until he suddenly learned that sentence of death had been recorded

against him. This proved a double sentence. On the morning appointed for the execution, the unhappy young man was taken ill: he died three days later, resigned, nay, happy, and I will add that a more beautiful death-bed never crowned a blameless life.'

"And now, my friend," added the Countess, with a smile, you know why I bought that Velasquez, and why I like it. The original of that portrait was a gentleman of noble birth and noble life, who fought bravely for his country, and died in her cause. His name is kept in her records, his bones rest in one of her Moorish cathedrals, and ancient banners, taken from her foes, hang over his marble effigy. To crown all, a great painter left this semblance of him. It has passed through famous collections, been catalogued, described, and engraved again and again. The whole world knows that pale and manly face, that look of incomparable dignity; but something which the world does not know I do. I know that one

who wore this Spanish soldier's likeness also possessed his virtues. I know that he lived in infamy, and died in sorrow, and I know that he loved me as I have never been loved, save by him. My husband was very fond of me, to be sure; but he did not adore me, not he. When I remarried—a young and childless widow—I had plenty of suitors; but adoration I never had again. It had been given to me once, and was offered no more. And yet I was a beauty, people said, and many added that I was witty, and I did not live in the shade, but was as much exposed to admiration as a garden flower is to the sun. So that brings me back to my argument, that there is nothing so rare as the pure, lofty, and yet deep worship of one being for another."

Now, I protest, reader that I had never disputed this proposition in the least, and the turn which the Countess thus gave to our argument contains a most gratuitous aspersion on my good sense. However, I let her have her own way—the only wise

plan with a woman, and I merely said:

"My dear Madam, I cannot tell you how much I have felt interested in this romantic episode of your youth." I could not say less, you know, reader. "But allow me to put a question: how came your parents to trust you to the skill of that unfortunate Monsieur Pierre?"

"Ah, to be sure! I forgot to tell you that. Well, you must know that in those dark times there existed a strongly-rooted belief in the surgical skill of an executioner. He was held to possess it 'in virtue of his office.' I am bound to say that some of these men were really skilful. Monsieur Pierre, though so young, was celebrated throughout all France, and he deserved his fame. People flocked to him; but if he had given up his post he would have been deserted, and he knew it. Superstition itself combined against him, and kept him chained to his hard destiny, till Death came and set the captive free."

A Young Girl's Secret.

FOR a long time my cousin, Madame le Tellier, had been urging me to pay her a visit. At last, though not without regret, I accepted her invitation to spend some weeks with her at an estate she had bought at the further end of Normandy, and which I had not yet seen. I felt a sort of sadness at leaving the quiet abode where for near twenty years I had lived so pleasantly. An unmarried woman without family ties grows old very quickly in solitude. I became conscious of this when the time

arrived for setting out on my journey—a journey that I have always, I confess, repented of having taken, and to which I owe the only romantic incident of my life. It was terrible weather when I started. It rained all the morning, and still it was raining when, towards the close of the day, I arrived at the station of N——, where Madame le Tellier's carriage was waiting for me.

The road leading to my cousin's house crossed extensive and dreary plains. The rain had ceased, and the last pale, cold rays of an autumn sun gleamed on the marshy pools, over which the swallows were lightly skimming in rapid and whirling flight. The road was so bad that the horses could only proceed at a foot pace; the driver sat carelessly whistling a tune, whilst I gazed sadly at the scene before me, and regretted already my cozy room, my books, and my peaceful home. There was something so inexpressibly mournful and desolate in the general aspect of the country.

The sun had set. The nearer part of the landscape became enveloped in the deep shadows of evening, and as twilight crept gradually over the plain it seemed to drive the remaining light to the furthest limits of the horizon. Soon a faint streak only illumined the lower part of the picture, and across that dull grey space passed a company of peasants slowly riding home from market. This peaceable cavalcade was reflected, together with the flying clouds of the rainy evening sky, in the standing green water of a large pond. It was autumn in all its chillness and sadness.

At last we arrived at my cousin's house. It was an ancient edifice, large and sombre. Its vast halls and long narrow windows, which I perceived on entering, made my heart shrink within me. Apparently there was plenty of space to grow weary in. But time was not allowed me to dwell on saddening thoughts, for I heard both the footstep and voice of my relative as she hastened to greet me.

Good Madame le Tellier was one of the kindest women in the world. She welcomed me to her home, evidently with real delight; yet I fancied I detected a trace of sadness mingled with her joy. Her circumstances were affluent, her wealth was good; I thought it likely, therefore, that her young niece, Marie Blanchet, an orphan she had brought up from childhood and for whom she had a very great affection, might have given her some cause for anxiety.

While installing myself in my room (alas! what a dreary room it was; yet it was the best in the house) I asked "What has become of Marie?"

"She is gone to visit a sick friend, a young girl who is dying of a heart complaint. She will soon return."

"Is she well?"

"Oh, perfectly well," replied Madame le Tellier, a shade of sadness passing over her countenance, as though she were announcing some sorrowful news.

Old maids have the reputation of being

prying, whether truly or not I cannot tell; but I think they are not. I, however, merely said to my cousin, "Why does not she marry?"

"Ah! why, indeed. She is as beautiful as an angel; as good as it is possible to be. My fortune is secured to her, and suitors are not wanting. But Marie refuses them one after another, and she is now twenty-four years of age."

"Perhaps she has some secret attachment."

"Marie! oh, fie! I have left her perfectly free. 'Marry whom you will,' I have said to her, 'only, as I could not bear to be separated from you, let it not be an officer.' And fortunately not one has presented himself."

"Perhaps she inclines to a convent life, and fears to confess it to you."

"Not at all. The same idea occurred to me, and I spoke to her on the subject, when she smiled and assured me that the thought of a convent had never crossed her mind. No; it is not marriage she objects

to, but the husbands who have hitherto presented themselves. Ah! How much I regret M. de Ménars. I never knew a more estimable man. He is scarcely thirty years of age, has a very fine fortune, and besides a cultivated mind possesses every agreeable and solid quality necessary to ensure a wife's happiness. He was greatly attached, too, to Marie."

"And she would not have him?" I exclaimed, in astonishment. "How strange; I have met M. de Ménars in Paris; he is a charming man."

"Well; she refused him twice," said Madame le Tellier, with a sigh, "and now he is just married; so there's an end of that."

"Dear cousin," I said, "I really cannot understand it."

And truly I could not understand it. Marie—who came in unexpectedly at that moment and embraced me affectionately—did not look as if destined to remain a spinster. She was a blonde, with frank blue eyes and a sweetly expressive counte-

nance. Though she was twenty-four she looked scarcely eighteen. Her features were pleasing, and she had still all the grace, gaiety, and naïveté of youth. Nothing could be more engaging than her smile, and I could readily believe that M. de Ménars had been an ardent admirer of so pretty a girl. But it was not so easy to understand why she had twice refused a man still young, rich, eligible in every respect, and very much in love.

I had known Marie from her birth, and, therefore, thought myself privileged to question her. My cousin had kept a watchful eye on us; but we went down together to the large drawing-room and were alone. Marie sat in the deep embrasure of one of the windows gazing on the scudding storm clouds. Of what was she thinking?

"Marie," I began without any preamble, "how is it that you will not marry?"

"I am quite willing to marry, cousin," she replied, very naïvely.

"Indeed! Then why are you still Marie Blanchet?"

"Because I am waiting," she said, with a merry smile. I endeavoured vainly to draw from her some other explanation. In whatever way I attacked her, she escaped me. "She was waiting." In that assertion, as in an impregnable fortress, she took up her position and could not be drawn from it, and as my cousin again joined us it was necessary to change the conversation.

Being unaccustomed to the monotony of provincial family life, I confess that I already felt inexpressibly weary of it. After dinner the dulness of the evening was broken by a violent storm, which so unnerved Madame le Tellier that she was obliged to go to bed. I also retired to my room, and notwithstanding the continued vivid flashing of the lightning I tried to read. But I was agitated, and the book soon fell from my hands. Gradually the storm passed over, thunder occasionally rumbling in the distance. The servant had forgotten to close the shutters in my room, and through the latticed window-

panes I could see the large trees of the garden shaken to and fro by the fury of the wind, and the moon hastily rushing, as it seemed, through the cloudy sky.

A light tap on the door made me start. I rose and opened it. Marie stood there, very pale and holding in her hand an open letter.

"Cousin," she said, in a voice trembling with emotion, "I have come to ask you a great favour. My poor Constance, who was better but a few hours ago, is now dying, and asks me to go to her again this evening. Her mother has written entreating me to gratify her. Will you have the goodness to accompany me? The Château de Mersan is a league from this; my aunt objects to my going alone, and our poor Françoise is too unwell to venture out, even in a carriage."

With much difficulty, I concealed the pain and fear this request occasioned me. If I am alone in the world, it is because those whom I have most loved have one by one been taken from me. My life is

filled with their loved shadows, and memory loves to dwell on them, but not to recall the anguishing hour of their last farewell. I shudder at the thought of attending a death-bed. That terrible struggle, in which strength, youth, life, all are vanquished, depresses my whole soul, but I had sufficient control over myself to conceal my feelings, and instantly acceded to Marie's request. We set out immediately. This doleful journey filled me with gloom, and Marie's conversation was not enlivening. She began crying as we entered the carriage, and when her distress was a little calmed, she talked to me continuously of Constance de Mersan.

"She is an angel," she said. "If she were to recover she would become a Carmelite. Ah! had a desire for the religious vocation but been given to me, I should now be a saint in some convent. Constance is perfectly beautiful. She would, from obedience to the wishes of her parents, who greatly desired the match, have married M. de Ménars, but for her-

self, she was ambitious only of a convent cell."

"For what reason then did not your friend become Madame de Ménars?"

"Could you conceive such a thing, cousin!" exclaimed Marie, with much animation. "Everybody was talking of their marriage, and M. de Ménars always danced with Constance, when suddenly it appeared that it was not her; but another whom he desired to marry."

"And that other—was Marie Blanchet?"

For a moment Marie was confused, then replied, very coldly, "Well, yes—it was. But do you suppose I was willing to listen to him—that I could pardon him for forsaking my dear Constance?"

"But if he did not love her, my dear Marie?"

"He ought to have loved her," exclaimed Marie, very warmly.

"But, my child, when a man of honour—and M. de Ménars bears a very high character—withdraws his attentions, he has usually some good reason for doing—"

"You are accusing Constance," she interrupted, indignantly.

"Not the least in the world. Constance is an angel—you have said so, but if M. de Ménars has no fancy for angels, what can you do?"

Marie was silent. I perceived that she was offended. It is the way with young people; their friendships and aversions are always in some degree passionate and arbitrary.

But at last we arrived at the Château de Mersan. I saw, or rather fancied I saw, a large dark building, and Marie pointed out to me a dimly-lighted window on the second story.

"That is her room," she said, in a mournful tone; "poor Constance! When I left her she had hope that she might recover."

An aged woman, a relative of the family, received us, and conducted us to Mademoiselle de Mersan's room. Never shall I forget the spectacle which there met my eyes. It was, I believe, a very large and

very dreary room. I remember that only a single taper was burning on the table. There was an ivory crucifix at the foot of a large alcove, and in the shade were some pale sad faces. These are, I must own, but confused recollections. That, however, which is always present to my mental vision, and which nothing can ever efface from my memory was Constance de Mersan herself. She was lying on a sofa, and entirely covered with a white cashmere dressing-gown, which had very much the appearance of a shroud, and increased the paleness of her face and her hands, which lay crossed on her bosom.

Not even the cruel malady of which this young girl was dying could obliterate her beauty. Her features were perfect, her eyes dark and languishing. When Marie approached her, she smiled, and in her smile there was something infinitely alluring. One could scarcely believe, while gazing upon her, that so beautiful a being could die. Marie was pretty

only; Constance, exquisitely beautiful. She motioned to the women who sat by her, and they rose instantly to leave. I was about to retire with them; but Mademoiselle de Mersan bade me stay.

"Are you the cousin?" she said. "I bowed affirmatively. "Remain then," she said, "Marie will want you." I obeyed; but the imperious tone of the young girl astonished me; and I began to perceive in the expression of her countenance, which at first had struck me as so gentle, a something strange and indomitable. Her mother softly murmured a few words which did not reach my ear. She asked, perhaps, to be allowed also to remain; for her daughter, in a harsh tone, replied "No." The poor mother then withdrew, stifling her sobs, and the door closed upon her. Marie was seated by her friend, I a little further off and more in the shade, where I could see them both perfectly.

"Marie," said Constance, "you must not be surprised that I asked you to

return, for you have much to forgive me."

"I have!" said Marie. "I! Constance?"

"Yes, you. But I will begin by speaking of myself. There is a cruel connection between your fate and mine, which you have never known. You remember M. de Ménars, do not you? All your misfortunes and mine come from him."

"You loved him," exclaimed Marie.

"And he preferred you. Yes; there lies our misery."

"Ah, Constance—if I have been the cause of any suffering to you, forgive me." The tears stood in Marie's eyes, but Mademoiselle de Mersan laughed—a short nervous laugh that sent a chill through me. Marie was much disconcerted by it.

"Let me finish," resumed Constance. "Well, I was the more beautiful, and my fortune larger than yours; but you were the loved one. That love has brought you no happiness, my poor Marie. I vowed you should never be his wife; you

see I have kept my vow, and he is now married to another."

"Ah! you terrify me, Constance." I saw that Marie was trembling.

"Let me finish what I have to say," repeated Constance. "I should have had nothing of this to say, could I but have inspired you with a desire for a convent life. But you had no inclination for it, so, after all, it is in some degree your own fault."

Marie had become deadly pale. "Constance," she said, "you make me ill."

"Let me finish, I say!" again exclaimed the sick girl; and her cold monotonous and determined tone; her fixed look—as that of Fate in living form—alarmed me. I felt that her desperate love for M. de Ménars had made her cruel to my dear Marie. I was prepared for almost any confession, yet was far from divining the true one.

"You recollect the préfet's ball," she said, "two years ago. You remember

having danced there with my brother, the captain?"

Poor Marie blushed so deeply, I felt pained for her. She replied, hesitatingly, "Yes, I believe—I don't—"

"Marie, Marie!" explained Constance, with a sudden burst of energy. "I know all!"

Marie rose from her seat. Her face was crimson. "He has betrayed me then," she said, in a tone of anguish.

"I know all," repeated Constance. I know that for two years he has been writing to you from Africa. You receive his letters secretly, and I know to whose hands you entrust yours. Marie, your last letter to my brother ended thus—'do not ask me if I love you.'"

"Your brother, then, is dishonourable—base!" exclaimed Marie, despairingly.

"No, Marie, he is not."

"Who, then, has told you this? How do you know it?" They were looking fixedly at each other, and had quite forgotten my presence. Their faces—both

beautiful; but oh, how different! One already touched by the hand of death; the other, though oppressed by grief, full of life—will remain for ever impressed on my memory.

"Do not you guess, then?" murmured Constance, with painful irritation. "Must all be told to you?"

"Speak, speak, keep me no longer in suspense," cried Marie.

"Well—be it so—I saw that my brother pleased you. It was, indeed, but a passing caprice, and another, when he was gone, would soon have driven him from your thoughts. But I was resolved that you should not forget him."

"Good Heavens! It was you then who induced him to write to me?"

"No, Marie. It was I who wrote to you in his name. Here are your letters." She placed on Marie's lap a small black box; then fell back on the sofa, utterly exhausted. I then understood why she had desired me to stay. Marie was still as one on whom a thunderbolt had fallen.

The greatness of her misfortune had deprived her of all sensation. Her eyes were fixed on me, yet saw me not, and from her parted lips there issued neither sigh nor sob. I, too, stood motionless, fearing even to speak, it seemed to me that the slightest sound would crush everything around me. It was Constance who first broke this deep silence.

"I do not," she said, "conceal from myself that my crime is a great, a terrible one. And yet I have given you two years of happiness. You were in heaven; I was suffering a thousand tortures. Ah! you will never know how hard a thing it is to speak the language of a happy love while dying of an unrequited one! How often I have been tempted, while writing to you, to give way to the despair that was consuming me. Perhaps you will not believe that a sentiment of pity for you alone restrained me. Marie, do me this justice — the illusion was a pure and pleasing one."

"No—oh, no! you do not speak truly,"

exclaimed Marie, as though awakened from a frightful dream. "It was not you who wrote those letters—no. I have not given my youth, my life, my soul to a mere phantom. Perhaps he is dead; or he may be unfaithful, and have forgotten me; but he loved me—he loved me. I tell you he loved me!"

Constance made no reply; her head drooped.

Marie burst into sobs. "What had I done to you?" she cried. "What had I done to you, Constance?"

"Nothing," she answered, in a mournful tone. "But *he* loved you. He marries another, I know; but at least he does not marry you."

I know not whether Marie heard this; but she was seized with a nervous trembling, so violent that I thought she would have fainted, and I approached to support her.

"Take her away," said Constance, "and take her letters with you."

"Come, my child," I said. Marie rose

on hearing my voice. I took her hand and led her towards the door. On its threshold she turned, and by an effort whispered softly, "Constance, I pardon you."

The carriage was waiting for us. The moon now shone bright and beautiful, and the blue sky was cloudless. But our journey home was a terrible one, for Marie did not weep, but moaned feebly as one overwhelmed with sorrow. I dared not attempt to console her, being too much affected myself by the scene I had witnessed. The perversity of Mademoiselle de Mersan amazed me. She had combined every circumstance with so much perfidy and art—a young girl's caprice; my cousin's dislike for the military profession, and the absence of her brother, had each been a sure weapon in her hand. Did she repent? I doubted it. But she knew that her death would betray all, and she determined to bequeath her secret to one whom grief and shame would prevent from revealing it.

"I cannot see my aunt," said Marie as we entered the house. "Tell her nothing of what has occurred, cousin. It would make her so unhappy. By and by she will know all—my sin and its punishment."

"I will reveal nothing, my dear child," I replied. "But take courage. God will be with you."

"Well," said Madame le Tellier, as soon as I went to her room, "how is poor Constance? Is not she an angel?"

What answer I made, I know not. The epithet sounded strangely to me after what I had heard and witnessed.

"Poor Marie," resumed my cousin, "she will be quite in despair. She loses an incomparable friend—pious, gentle, and affectionate. I grieve greatly for her," and Madame le Tellier wept.

It was necessary to console her—never had anything seemed so difficult to me. What can be more sad than a sorrow that appears in every way justified, yet is in reality an utterly groundless one? I felt

truly relieved when I was able to leave my poor cousin.

Mademoiselle de Mersan died that same night. I had given Marie the box of letters I brought away with me. The next day she opened it, and with a sort of silent sorrow, gazed mournfully on those sad missives, which time had already discoloured. She then burned them one by one.

"I have burned the others," she said. "I did begin to read them again, but was unable to go through them. They were beautiful letters, and I found a fearful charm in them—something attractive yet terrible. How could I fancy that that soldier, with his honest face and frank smile could thus write to me? Never did brother and sister less resemble each other."

"Marie, you love him, I see. Hope then. The young man will return. I will speak to my cousin."

Marie, with a sort of terror, interrupted me—"Never, never!" she exclaimed. "It

would be necessary to confess everything to Mademoiselle. I should die of it. My cousin, I have had a dream. I shall never recover this blow—that is all."

And she did not recover. Captain de Mersan was killed at Kybele a few months after the death of his sister. I was then in Paris, and a letter from Marie informed me of his death.

"If I could weep for him," she said, "if I had been anything to him in life, I should feel cruel regret, no doubt; but instead of a blighted past I should have had a pure and loving one. But alas! I have lived only in a dream. He whom I deplore, in spite of myself, would have heard of my death with indifference. He has filled two years of my life, and I have had no place in his. What is sadder still, it is probable that had I really known him, I might not have loved him. You tell me to take courage; that I am still young; and that there may yet be many compensations in life to atone to me for this sorrow. I wish I could think so, but I

cannot. It seems to me that these are certain incurable maladies of the mind, as well as of the body. My life I hope may be tranquil, and that, wanting happiness, I may be content with peace.

"But can I ever conceal from myself that my life has been one of illusion? Neither my happiness nor my grief has had any real foundation. If I had been, as I fancied I was, the betrothed wife of Captain de Mersan, who died gallantly fighting for his country, something would remain to me. The brightness of the morning of my life would have gilded it even to the evening of my days. One may live on the memory of happiness and even on one's regrets, but one dies when the heart has but a faded dream to dwell upon.

"Forgive me these complainings. I can only open my heart to you. I should too deeply afflict my aunt, were I to tell her of my error. Some day I will confess everything, but at present courage fails me."

I perceived from this letter that my

poor Marie was indeed very deeply wounded. Time, perhaps, might have brought her consolation; but God reserved a cruel trial for my cousin—Marie was taken from her by a brain fever. She was delirious throughout her illness, and died without any recovery of her mental faculties. Her early death was the cause of deepest affliction to Madame le Tellier.

"Come and console me," she wrote, and I was unable to refuse to accede to her pressing request, and was soon once more on my way to N——.

It was Spring. Apple trees in full bloom bordered the roads. Thin white clouds floated across the deep blue sky; the ground was carpeted with verdure of tenderest green, and the air was laden with the sweet fragrance of flowers.

When the carriage stopped before the porch of my cousin's house, I remarked in that ancient dwelling a certain air of renewed youth which distressed me. Windows and doors were all open, the old chambers were flooded with sunshine,

which gave them an air of gaiety. The garden smelt sweetly, the trees were covered with young leaves of the bright hue of Spring. The birds carrolled gaily; everything seemed teeming with life; and Marie, still so young, so charming, so tenderly loved, was no longer there.

"One short month ago, and she was still with me," were Madame le Tellier's first words, and the poor woman sobbed aloud. How was I to console this afflicted mother—for Marie was the child of her heart's best love? I did not even try, but mingled my tears with hers. "Ah!" she exclaimed, "you have done me real good."

That same evening we went to the cemetery. It was a small enclosure on the slope of a hill, near the church. In that garden of death one saw nothing but flowers, mouldy wooden crosses, and two white stones, before which my cousin stopped and silently knelt down.

On one of the tombs I read the name of MARIE, on the other CONSTANCE DE MERSAN. "I had her laid by the side of her friend,"

said my cousin, "they loved each other so much!"

Poor Marie! she bore her sorrow in silence until the end, and carried her secret with her to the grave.

I gazed long on these two new tombs, both bordered with white flowers, beneath which slept the slayer and her victim. And again, in fancy, I beheld those two young girls as last I had seen them—one with her pale sombre beauty; the other smiling and attractive as a morning in spring, now both lying together in the damp earth. The silence of evening reigned in this peaceful spot. My cousin was still on her knees, weeping in silence. At last she rose. "We will go," she said, "but all my happiness is buried there."

Slowly we returned, leaving those two destinies sleeping there hidden and unknown, like so many others whose fate the world will never know.

The Broken Charm.

WHEN I was twenty, botany was my passion. I was "struck" with it, if I may so speak, and I am not very sure that I am cured now. I never sit in a railway-carriage and feel myself borne at fierce express speed through a green landscape without remembering regretfully those days when I lingered on the wild mountain side, or plunged eager and ardent as a knight of romance into the depths of the forest. His quest was beauty in distress to deliver, a mighty paynim giant to lay

low; mine was to discover some fair flower sleeping in the shade of ancient trees, or to snatch some cruel poisonous weed from its lair. The knight was a happy knight, I have no doubt; but I do not think he could be a happier man than John Graves, your humble servant.

France was the scene of my chief exploits in those days. My father had left England for economy's sake, and settled at some distance from Paris. The country around our home was not interesting, botanically speaking; and I was in the habit of taking long and solitary excursions, during one of which I met with the following adventure.

I had spent the morning on the skirt of a forest. Towards noon I entered it, rested awhile, and started again. Ere long I came to a spot where many avenues—seven, I believe—met, and whence they radiated like the points of a star. In the middle of this open space rose a tall and slender pyramid, with a gilt ball on the top. This was the very

centre of the forest. Not a soul was was visible; not a stately deer or a frightened hare disturbed the silence of the spot. The solemn trees rose around me, leaving just a circular roof of sky above, then they divided into their long seven lonely alleys. It was grand and very fine, but it was also depressing. I sat down on the lowest of the three steps, above which rose the pyramid, and I let a picture of the past flit before me.

Here, if tradition spoke true, often came that gay hunter, Francis the First, and after him his son Henri, both with the same lady huntress. Perhaps she was only a sort of prime minister after all, as some historians declare. Tastes vary so. Some kings like a pale Cardinal de Richelieu, and others (like these two) a Diana of Poitiers, fair-haired and blue-eyed, who, if she now and then sat to Primaticio as the goddess Flora, also caused that haughty medal to be struck, in which she appears trampling love under her feet with the imperious motto, "I have conquered

the conqueror of all." But, oh! what din, what tumult, what halloing of hounds and trampling of horses, there was in those days, and how sadly quiet these good people were all now.

I know this will be reckoned very trite, but I maintain that the triteness lies not with me, but with old Father Time, who is ever telling us the same story. Ages pass, and Diana is replaced by Fontanges, who ties up her hair with a wonderful ribband that sends the world mad, or we see that pretty Madame d'Etielles in this very forest lying in wait for a king's heart, and dying later—rare honour!—in Versailles, under the name of Madame de Pompadour; but other variety we must not expect.

I got tired of these phantoms as I sat thus at the base of the pyramid. I got tired, too, of those endless avenues stretching for ever away before me; so I rose and struck into one, walking rather fast, and glancing right and left in search of botanical treasures. I found none, but

saw a strange abundance of a pale variety of the Solanum tribe. I gathered a bunch, then a few ferns, and, rather wearied with my profitless day, I quickened my pace in order to get out of the forest before nightfall.

I must have been very near the outskirt when my adventure began. I saw nothing, but I heard, in a thicket on my right hand, a low, plaintive, and not unmelodious whistle. I stood still to listen, and it ceased. Presently it was repeated, and something gliding in the grass near me made it move and rustle. I looked, but the creature, if it were one, was already gone. The whistle sounded again, but at some distance from me; and further away, too, the motion I had already perceived was repeated. It was too dark already for me to distinguish more than that motion of the grass, and it told me nothing. Again the whistle was repeated, but so far away or so faintly that I could scarcely hear it. Then it ceased, and I heard it no more.

I was perplexed. I had seen nothing, neither human being, nor beast, nor bird. The trees were scarce, the thickets were stunted, the grass was poor and thin, and a few moss-covered rocks which were scattered about were too low to conceal even a child from my ken. Yet some one had been near me, and something had passed within my reach, which was not, however, within my knowledge. I was armed with a stout stick. I beat the bushes about me, and only startled a little harmless bird from its nest. I went round the rocks and explored them, and found a few mosses, which I put in my tin box; and this was the sole result of my quest. It was useless to pursue it; the greyness of evening was stealing on me fast, and the country before me looked flat and rather desolate.

I am not sure that I ought to go on, and tell the reader what follows. I have called it an adventure, and many will think that it scarcely deserves the name. But I believe that adventures are half the

time productions of our own mood. I believe they spring from something within us, which, if I may so speak, calls them into existence, as the voice of the enchanter wakens spirits in the old tales of sorcery. Some people cannot have adventures—there is no sympathy between the spirit of adventure and them; and others cannot stir but, lo! some adventure starts up, like the little wicked diablotin in the French toy. I belong to neither class, and have neither more nor less than my share of this doubtful commodity; but the adventurous mood was on me this day, and would not let me rest.

I walked on, only thinking of reaching some village by nightfall, when I heard again the low whistle which I had heard in the forest. This time it came from some distance, and it stole so faintly over the silent plain that, but for the evening stillness, I could not have heard it at all. I saw no one, but a low hedge which straggled through the fields might conceal a man easily. I was walking in the opposite direc-

tion to this. I altered my course at once. I soon reached the hedge, but saw no token of the whistler; no great marvel after all. The path in which I now found myself was a narrow winding one, which delved down to a little valley. Here, as I soon perceived, clustered a few houses, where lights were already twinkling like mild glowworms.

The first of these houses I entered. The door was open, so I was spared the trouble of knocking. In my best French I bade its tenant a good evening, and asked for a drink, and the way to an inn, if such a thing was to be found in the vicinity.

A man looked up from the fireplace, where he was stirring something in an iron pot. He returned my salutation, and civilly replied that I could have a drink of milk if I pleased, and that the nearest inn was a league off. I was tired to death, and asked if I might rest awhile.

"Certainly, Sir," replied the man, rising to give me a three-legged stool

"Would you like some bread with your milk? You seem fatigued."

I thankfully accepted.

"Prudence," he said, raising his voice, "give some milk to Monsieur."

The door of an inner room opened, and Prudence came forth, bearing a tin candlestick with a flaring tallow candle in it. The man was a common peasant, tanned, red-cheeked, coarse, and good-humoured looking. I saw dozens such daily; but his wife was wholly unlike him, unlike any woman I had ever seen. She was middle-sized, but so slender that she looked tall. She wore a close black jacket and dark petticoat, that left her feet and ankles bare. They were small and well-made, so were her hands. Her neck too was long and slender, without being thin; her head was remarkably small, but flat and not well shaped. Her face was narrow and very sallow, with thin mobile features, and the strangest little glittering brown eyes. She had black hair, and wore no cap, and though by no means

ugly, she was, to me at least, one of the most repelling-looking persons it was possible to see.

"Milk," she answered, "certainly."

She put down her light, fetched a tin can from a shelf, and filling a coarse crockery cup with rich-looking milk, she handed it to me. Her motions were graceful, and her smile and look meant to be courteous; but I had something to do not to betray my instinctive horror of this woman. I thanked her as graciously as I could, and praised her cow. She smiled (I must say that this woman had a restless way of looking at you which was not pleasant, and that her smile only made it worse) and she said:

"I have no cow—we are too poor for that."

"I walk a league every day for that milk," put in the husband, who was still stirring the contents of the iron pot on the fire. "Give the loaf to Monsieur, Prudence."

She obeyed, and I remarked:

"You are fond of milk."

"We never drink any," she replied, smiling again; "we are too poor."

I did not think it civil to ask what Madame Prudence did with the contents of the tin can—a large one—since she could not afford to drink milk; but I ate and drank in silence.

I hoped to leave the cottage as soon as I had done, and reach the inn which the man had mentioned; but it was not to be. A sudden flash of light filled the room, then a loud thunder-peal followed, and after it came a fierce rush of rain. The man crossed himself, and Prudence coolly went and shut the door behind me. It was a terrible storm, a fierce and a long one. The thunder rolled and rolled, and the rain poured and poured, and Prudence and her husband sat down to their plateful of soup each, and went through it with perfect equanimity, whilst I walked up and down the room in silent vexation. I do not know, indeed, why I was so vexed at this trifling delay; I half fancy it was

because of the little restless eyes of Prudence. I tried to avoid them, but could not. Wherever I went, they seemed to follow me; and as she sat with her back to the wall, it was impossible to shun them by getting behind her.

The storm did not cease, or even grow less, as I had expected it would, and Prudence said, very civilly:

"Perhaps Monsieur would like to spend the night here? I can go and sleep with a neighbour, and make up a bed for my husband in this room. Our bed is a good one."

"Thank you," I replied, hurriedly; "I must go on."

"Monsieur can scarcely go on to-night," replied Prudence, with her smile; "there is no inn within a league; the way to it is across the country, and the men about here are too great poltroons to show Monsieur the way in such a storm as this."

The latter remark was uttered with a quick scornful glance at her husband, who sullenly muttered something about not

being more afraid than another, but who did not volunteer to be my guide.

I had no alternative. It was getting late. I had no right to intrude any longer on these people unless I accepted their offer, and, spite the eyes of Prudence, I did so. She rose and went into the inner room to prepare it for me. It was a relief to think that I should soon be out of her sight. In the meanwhile I tried to get some desultory information from her husband, but his plateful of soup had made him sleepy, and, as nature had also made him stupid, I soon gave him up. Before long, Prudence came out, and, with her smile, informed Monsieur that everything was ready. Monsieur took the candlestick from her hand, and, muttering ungracious thanks, entered his apartment.

My first care was to fasten the door, but, as there was no lock on the door, I had to barricade it. Two chairs and a table did the thing. I protest that I apprehended no personal danger; I only feared that Prudence would come in and

look at me. It was not likely she would do so; she was not to sleep in the cottage; besides, the temptation of seeing me in my slumbers, with a handkerchief tied round my head, might not be irresistible; but fear and reason have nothing in common, and fear, being strong, prevailed and had her way. My room, though small, was tolerably clean, and the bed justified Prudence's eulogium; it was a very good bed indeed. I was tired, and I was young; in five minutes I was fast asleep.

Heaven save my worst enemy from such slumbers, or rather from such dreams, as I had. The whole night long Prudence and I were striving for mastery, and every time we engaged in combat she prevailed against me. We never came to blows, but it was a fell and cruel struggle for all that. When I tried to strike her, she laughed, and my hand fell back powerless; then with her supple and nervous arms, strong as steel, she would embrace me, and tighten her hold, and look at me

with a smile, till I shrieked with terror, and asked for mercy, which I never got. I do not know how the fight ended, but it began again and again, without a particle of variety. I believe this dreadful monotony wearied me as much as the struggle itself. I know that when I woke I was in a profuse perspiration. The greyness of early morning stole in through my little window. I saw the whitewashed walls adorned with a few prints, devotional or warlike, but nailed in the plaister, and frameless. This was the only bit of feminine embellishment—and it might as well have come from the husband as from Prudence—which betrayed the presence of a woman. There was no pincushion on the chest of drawers, and no flower-pot outside the window; everything was cold, bare, and comfortless-looking. It was rather ungracious in me to be thus criticising Prudence's domestic arrangements, whilst I was lying in her bed; but I owed her a grudge for the night she had given me, and I went on commenting without

scruple. Ere long I paused. I stared, and could not believe what I saw to be real; and yet, if seeing be believing, I was not deceived. At the foot of the bed, just a little beyond it, strung on a slender reed like herrings, I saw a row of black vipers. The reed itself was fastened to two nails in the wall.

I have a horror of serpents; their sight alone is hateful to me. I sprung out of bed, I bundled on a few clothes, I kicked the chairs away from the door, and I entered the kitchen in a towering passion.

"What do you mean by poisoning me with those abominable reptiles?" I asked of the man, who was already up and busy. "How dare you make me sleep in the same room with a set of vipers?"

I so startled him that, in his confusion, the poor fellow dropped my tin box, which he had been examining.

"They are dead, Sir," he said apologetically.

This exasperated me.

"Do you take me for an idiot? Of

course they are dead. A pretty thing if they were alive and crawling!"

"They would bite you if they were alive, Sir," he shrewdly replied.

The fellow's incorrigible stupidity calmed me. It was no use to argue, and I wanted to know why those abominable creatures were there. I put the question.

"We always keep them there, lest any one should come and steal them," he replied; "they are worth ten sous apiece now."

I began to understand the facts of the case. These people killed these vipers, and got the Government reward for doing so.

"You have got a dangerous trade, my good fellow," I said; "be careful."

"It is Prudence who does it; she has the secret, only she will not tell it to me. I have begged and prayed for it again and again, but she will not give it to me. She says two cannot have it, and that it would kill her. Now, you know, that is hard upon me," he continued, with engaging

candour; "for, suppose she dies, I am left destitute, as it were."

"And have you no idea how she does it?" I asked.

"I know she takes milk out with her, and I have heard her whistle; and once I came home unexpectedly, and I caught her making a sort of tisane, and, Monsieur may believe me, she was boiling her pot on the fire yonder, and she threw in handsful of that very herb Monsieur has got there."

He pointed to the contents of my tin box. I took the withered herbs.

"That," I said, "is the——"

I had no time to end the sentence. A hand snatched the weeds from mine, and Prudence thrust her face between us.

"Monster! devil!" she shrieked; "do you want to kill me? to kill me?"

She was in a frightful rage, but her pale face was not disturbed; it was the face I had seen all night—cruel, relentless, abhorrent—to me, at least—but not otherwise altered. It was her husband whom

she addressed, and he slunk away like a detected hound. His wife's anger was as brief as it was violent; she gave him a look of contempt, then turned to me and smiled.

"Has Monsieur slept well, and will he have any breakfast?" she asked, smoothly. "We shall soon have beautiful milk."

Now, it was prejudice, of course; but I could not make up my mind to drink milk in Prudence's house; it would have tasted "viperish" to me, though the cow that gave it had been the fair Io herself. I declined Prudence's courtesy with brief thanks, entered my room, and finished dressing. Within five minutes I had paid my bill, and was on my road to the inn in the next village, with Prudence's husband as my guide. I did not need his services, but I could see the poor wretch wanted to get away from his wife, whose eye, when it fell upon him, took a particularly evil expression; moreover, I was not sorry to have a chat with him. I had no need to draw him out; he was fasting and lively

now; besides, he wanted to explain why Prudence had got into such a passion, or rather why he had submitted to her fury so patiently.

"You see, Sir," he said, "she is a good girl, is Prudence—a little quick at times, but a good girl; and then she was a good match for me, and I must not forget it. The secret has been in her family for more than a hundred years; it has gone down from father to son, or to daughter, as the case might be, and all these girls have been sought after and have made good matches, whereas I had not a farthing."

"Then how came she to marry you?" I asked.

He looked at me and smiled complacently.

"She could not help herself, Sir; she was fond of me, you see."

"Why, then, will she not tell you the secret? You could both go hunting and catching vipers."

Prudence's husband looked gloomy and ill-used.

"She will not," he said, sullenly. "She says it would not work if it were known to more than one person, and that the vipers would bite and kill her. Now, that is an idea, as I tell her."

Every one has an idea in France, so I was not surprised at this remark of Prudence's husband, but I was surprised at what he told me. I put on a touch of incredulousness. Did Prudence really believe that the revelation of her secret would destroy her power?

"Did not Monsieur see and hear her?—did she not call me a monster, a devil, and ask if I wanted to kill her, and all because I had that bit of herb in my hand? But I have more of it," he added, nodding shrewdly, "and I will make the tisane when she is out, I will. You see, Monsieur, it is a hard case. Prudence got the secret from her mother on her death-bed, and she got it from her father in the same way; but suppose Prudence dies suddenly, she cannot give it to me and there I am."

"Then she has promised to tell it to you on her death-bed?"

"To be sure she has; I would not have married her without that. But, as I said, suppose she dies suddenly?"

"Perhaps there is no secret," I suggested sceptically.

"Oh, yes, there is. Prudence never meddled with vipers before her mother died, though she always had a serpent or two about her."

"A serpent!" I exclaimed; "and about her?"

"Yes, Sir; she liked the creatures; she used to have them coiled around her body to keep her cool in the hot weather, she said; and when she was a girl, and frolicsome, she would run after the other girls with a pet snake she had, and frighten them. She was very fond of it, but it vexed her one day, and she killed it."

"Did she ever make a pet of a viper?" I inquired gravely.

"No, she is afraid of them," he replied, confidentially; "but she sometimes kills

six in a day, and they are worth ten sous apiece now, and it is hard that she will not tell me the secret."

I comforted him with a franc, which I slipped into his hand as we at length reached the inn and parted company. "Now," I thought as I sat down to a decent cup of coffee with no viper associations about it, "who says the middle ages are dead? Here is a mediæval bit for you. This woman believes in her charm, whatever it may be, and goes forth to meet the viper with the faith of a hero wearing enchanted armour. Take that faith away, and her natural fear comes on and masters her. And yet how suited she is to that occupation such as it is!—she is a feminine viper, if ever there was one. She has the creature's serpentine grace, and its deadly look. I have no doubt that it feels an affinity towards her, and goes to its perdition with a sort of pleasure. She whistles, and it comes; she feeds it, and it drinks; and when it is stupified and torpid, I suppose she coolly

kills it, puts it on a hank, brings it home, and thereby earns ten sous. Yet this creature could feel love, and bestow her regard on that brutish lump, her husband, who is only contemplating the possibility of her sudden death, and the terrible loss such a calamity could entail upon him."

A pretty servant girl was waiting upon me. She had a frank communicative face; and as soon as I had opened my lips to say with whom I had spent the night, she was ready, good soul, with a torrent of words—more words, however than information.

"Ah! good Heavens, she would not have slept at Prudence's for the whole world. The woman dealt in witchcraft, else how could she talk to vipers and make them dance around her, then kill and sell them for twelve sous apiece?"

"Ten," I corrected, "and the vipers do not dance, Mademoiselle."

"I beg Monsieur's pardon. My own great aunt saw them dancing around Prudence's grandfather, and of course they do the same now."

I suggested that these were degenerate days, and that vipers might have lost their ancient gift; but I was not heeded. The torrent of words went on.

"It was witchcraft. Prudence took a drink which made the vipers come when she breathed upon them. But that same drink made her so sallow, and Prudence was never well. It would not end well. The silly woman had gone mad about her husband, and forced him as it were to marry her, when she might have had a much better match in my informant's own uncle. But it would not end well. Mathieu" (I now learned his name) "would have no peace till he had found out the secret; and once he had discovered it, the vipers could set upon Prudence and bite and kill her."

It would have been useless to argue, had I been inclined to do so, but I was not. I think, and have always thought, that to sit and take my breakfast quietly, whilst a pretty girl stands by and does the talking for me is simply one of the most

delightful and comfortable things in existence. The topic of Prudence having been fully exhausted by the time I had despatched my first course (I was twenty then, and had a vigorous hearty pedestrian's appetite), I ordered a second, and turned to a more congenial theme—botany. I did not, indeed, utter that barbarous word; but I simply inquired if dusty gentlemen, who had evidently seen some hard work, wandered about the country gathering weeds, which they safely stowed away in tin boxes.

"Oh, yes!" was the eager reply, "I have seen them. Does Monsieur know what they do with those weeds?"

I shook my head in solemn mystery.

"I suppose they sell them," resumed my pretty waitress, looking pensive; "they cannot fetch much."

"Less than vipers, I assure you; but what direction do those poor fellows chiefly favour?"

The explanation which followed was a tedious one, and it is not worth repeating.

Suffice it to say that I left the inn an hour after this, and that I struck into a path which was to take me to the other end of the forest I had explored on the preceding day.

The day was burning hot; the forest was oppressively close; but my tin box overflowed with some of the choicest plants I had ever found. It was a glorious day. I felt exultant and happy. I forgot fatigue, hunger, and thirst; but I also forgot the directions the pretty girl at the inn had given me so precisely, and the consequence was that I was lost in the forest. Now, this was not pleasant. The day was well nigh spent, and even Prudence's bed would have been a more acceptable couch than the bare earth at the root of a tree. Better dead vipers on a hank than live ones at liberty. I had read in my natural history that the viper is a slandered animal, which never attacks man; but just then my faith in such general maxims was loose. I remembered the seven avenues I had seen on the preceding day, and I wondered if

I could not find one, and thence the central pyramid. Give me that, and certain landmarks which I recollected would take me back to the village in which Prudence dwelt. Now, according to the rules of romance, I ought to have wandered up and down the forest all night, and never found the pyramid. But these rules were reversed in the present instance. The first path I took led me to one of the seven avenues, and far away from me, indeed, but quite distinct, I saw the pyramid and its gilt ball glittering in the light of the setting sun. I took heart and walked fast, and reached it ere long. But before I started on my next expedition I sat down at the foot of the pyramid, and rested a few moments. It was a divine evening. The long, low rays of the sinking sun poured from the west down one of the avenues; fire and gold are nothing to the splendour which swept along the green earth up the old trunks of trees, and reached their topmost boughs in the rosiest hues. It was a magnificent spectacle;

but I looked at my watch and rose. I turned round the pyramid, then stood still. A woman was lying asleep on the earth at my feet.

But was this sleep? I stooped; her eyes were fixed and open; her lips had parted in the gasp of her last agony; her face was livid, yet spite of its altered hues, I knew it—this was Prudence, the serpent-charmer, the viper-killer. And she was dead; I could not doubt it. I took her swollen hand, with the marks of a fatal sting on it still; and when I dropped it, it fell back loosely, with that inert weight which tells so much. She was dead, that woman whom I had seen all life and fury this morning, and the red sunlight swept across her rigid face, and only seemed to render its deadly sternness more apparent. How had it happened? Had she been surprised? Had she struggled with her enemy, as I had striven against her all night in my dreams, and as vainly? One thing I felt sure of, she had not been stung here. The fatal bite had been inflicted in

some remote spot, whence she had crept to this till the venom had seized her heart and sight first; then life had failed her. Remedies, if applied in time, might have saved her; but who was at hand to give them? Exhaustion, the intense heat of the day, and something too, perhaps, in her own constitution, had quickened the action of the poison, and brought on this unusually sudden termination. At least, I have been told that such cases are rare.

I stood and looked at her in a sort of stupor. She lay on the very spot where I had sat twenty-four hours before this, thinking of Diana of Poitiers and all sorts of dead men and women. And she, one of those strange links which connect the present and the past, had gone to join them now. Some ancestor of hers had, no doubt, been a viper-charmer in those days, and maybe exhibited his skill in royal presence, whilst another charmer looked haughtily on, conscious of equal power.

At length I roused myself. It was use-

less to linger by the poor dead wretch, so I left her there at the foot of the pyramid on the cold earth in the gathering darkness of evening, and I walked as fast as a severe state of fatigue would let me on to the cottage which I had left that morning. Save that no low whistle came stealing over the plain, everything looked as it looked on the previous evening. When I pushed open the door of Prudence's cottage, I again found her husband busy at the hearth cooking in the iron pot.

"Many vipers, Prudence?" he asked without looking up.

"It is not Prudence," I said.

He turned round with a start, and knew me at once. He rose with sudden excitement.

"Monsieur, Monsieur," he said, "you must tell me where you found that herb—it is the herb. I made the tisane to-day, and I had tasted Prudence's once, and it is the same; for—look!"

He went to the inner room, and came

out with a dead viper two feet long.

"You killed that?" I said.

He nodded; then added, "I do not mean to tell Prudence just yet—she would be jealous; besides, I want to show her that two can have the same secret."

I never knew how to break sad news. How I did it I cannot now remember; but the final words came out:

"Your wife is lying dead in the forest." I had no need to add, "a viper has stung her." He knew it. He sank down on his stool, stared wildly, and throwing up his hands, he said:

"Then it was true."

This, and no more was my adventure.

Two years later, indeed, I paid another visit to the forest, and met Mathieu. His right arm was in a sling, and with his left hand he was gathering dried sticks and withered boughs. He complained bitterly of his poverty.

"Then you have not taken to viper-killing?" I said.

He shook his head gloomily.

"It cannot be done without the secret, and two cannot use it and live."

"But you need not tell it."

He looked shyly at me; and his look said plainly, "She did not tell me, and I found it out."

My impression is, that Mathieu feared lest *I* should take to viper-killing.

And now a word of warning. Some imprudent reader may, fancying that the Solanum I have alluded to was the herb used by Mathieu, be tempted to try it. To that reader I say, that was NOT the herb.

Clement's Love.

EVERY little place has its doubtful character, its scapegoat, its bête noire, its vehicle for mischief, its embodiment of wickedness; we do not speak of crime, but of that form of wrong which the law cannot touch, but which the good deplore and the respectable abhor. Manneville would not have thought itself fit to be put down on the map if it had not had such a person every now and then. That person a few years ago happened to be a beautiful girl, tall, fair, and strong, with azure eyes and

golden hair; a girl fresh as a rose, and whose name, of all names, was Angélique.

She was an orphan. She had been reared by a weak old uncle, who let her grow up as she pleased, provided she did not trouble him. And as she cost him little or nothing—for she was not merely strong, but also clever, and would work hard and get well paid for her work, and moreover do anything she was pleased to turn her hand to—he let Angélique have her way till he died, and she remained alone in his little dark shingle house, perched on the cliff overlooking the sea on one side, and the valley and the village on the other.

The uncle of Angélique had no inheritance to leave with which the law could meddle. The house in which he had lived nearly all his life was not his: and as Angélique at once offered to pay the rent beforehand—and did so—her landlord, Maître André Grandsire, was too shrewd a Norman to turn out so safe a tenant.

"You see, boy," he said to his son Germain, "the girl gives no trouble. If we do not keep her, we may get some half-starved weaver instead, who will never pay a sou, and we shall have to let the house fall to pieces, as we did last year with that of the Mathieus—the only way to get rid of such rats."

Germain nodded sulkily, but added that he did not like Angélique. She was too bold. Maître André winked and laughed to himself. He knew that Germain was always sneaking after the girl, but what did he, the rich farmer and landlord, care? Boys would be boys, and Angélique was able to take care of herself. And thus it was that there was no one to meddle with the bright but defiant maiden of sixteen so early cast upon her own resources. She had grown up as fresh—as prickly too—as a wild rose, and she was left unmolested on her thorny stem.

The world did not like Angélique, and many people feared her. She did no actual harm, but she was reckless, and it

was felt that her mood would be dangerous. She dreaded nothing and no one, and cared but for one human being—an orphan lad, a little older than herself, named Clement Lereux: a gentle, pious, and silent youth, who had always worshipped her, and towards whom she had always been tender and mild. It was natural that Clement should think kindly of his friend, and natural too that others should not share his feeling; where he saw no harm, others saw nothing else.

As a child, Angélique had been as strong and as wild as any boy, and as a girl she showed that her passions were keen, and that she did not care to lay them under control. So when any deed of mischief was perpetrated in Manneville it became a matter of course to connect her with it. Proof might fail, but Angélique was certainly at the bottom of it. It was part of her wickedness, you see, that there should be no proof against her.

Angélique seldom entered the parish church, though when she did so she be-

haved herself modestly. The Curé made a few attempts to tame her. She listened to him respectfully, but took no heed of his counsel. "She is a wild thing," the good man said, "a wild thing, but she will know better," a charitable sentiment which few echoed. And yet Angélique was too handsome not to inspire other feelings than those of dislike or fear. Young men like Germain might not have a good word to say for her, but they liked her beauty. The girls who were most jealous of her did their best to imitate her her ways and her stately carriage. The matrons who shook their heads over her, also said it was a pity. Old men shrugged their shoulders and smiled when she was mentioned, and children looked at her half in fear, half in admiration, as she passed by, so fair, so tall, so bright, so beautiful a creature, spite of her wickedness and her bad name.

Clement was a weaver, and a hard-working one. When his day's work was done, he went up to the rocky height on

which Angélique's cottage stood, and sat there looking at the wide sea beneath him. If Angélique was at home and in the mood to please him she came and joined him for a few moments. If she did not appear, he made no attempt to seek her. She had not forbidden it, but he loved her dearly, with the love of a pure, proud nature, and her fair name was too precious in his eyes to be risked lightly. And for once a lover proved a girl's safeguard. No one could suspect Clement; and since he was there to worship as well as to watch, no one could venture to say a word, so far as love and lovers went, against naughty Angélique.

The day had been dark and sultry, and the evening sun sank red and sullen in a green and heavy-looking sea, when Clement went up as usual to his post, and as usual sat waiting patiently. He knew that Angélique was within, for her window was half open, and through it he had caught a glimpse of her moving to and fro, but he knew too that she was not in

the right mood for him, for giving him a careless nod she had closed the window in his face. At the end of half an hour her door opened, and Angélique came out; she ignored Clement, and turning her back to him and to the sea she swiftly went down the path leading to the village and the valley. Clement did not attempt to follow her; he did not even turn round to follow her light retreating figure with his wistful eyes; but he let time pass on, and sat looking at the red horizon that turned paler and paler as he looked, then at a faint star seeming to come forth from the darkness of the sky till it settled in a clear open spot, in calm and steady beauty.

"Now what are you doing here?" asked a young impatient voice, which he knew well, and always loved to hear, whatever its tones might be. Clement looked up and saw Angélique standing by him. She looked displeased, and there was a frown on her handsome face.

"I am looking at the sea!" he composedly answered.

"I have come to tell you that this must end," she continued, without heeding his answer, and speaking in a clear, cold voice. "It can never be, Clement."

Although she did not choose to speak more plainly, Clement no doubt understood her meaning, for his reply was a quiet:

"Why so?"

"Why so! you poor simple Clement; because I should be the ruin of you," answered Angélique, speaking in an altered tone, as she sat down on a stone facing him, and looked straight in his face with her saucy blue eyes, which just then had a very tender gleam in them. "I have liked you all my life, Clement, for you have been true to me, ay, true as a brother; I like you better than I shall ever like anyone else in this world, and surely you know it; but I will never marry you. You see you are good and I am wicked——"

"You are not," he interrupted, with a grave smile.

"I am," she persisted, "though you would never believe it. I am fond of you, indeed; but then you are fonder of me than I am of you, and so I would make you bad like myself, and you could not make me good as you are, and it would break your heart, and so you see I can never be your wife."

"Whose wife then will you be?" asked Clement, composedly.

Angélique impatiently shook her fair handsome head.

"How should I know? Is there not plenty of time to think of it?" she replied. "But not yours, Clement—never yours. Come up here to look at the sea as much as ever you please, but do not come up for *that!*"

She laughed, and her cheek had lost none of its rich bloom as she spoke. But sternness had gathered over Clement's pale face, his dark eyebrows were knit, and the whole meaning of his calm, thoughtful countenance, altered as he spoke.

"You shall be no man's wife save mine whilst I live," he said, rising.

"What?" cried Angélique.

"I say that whilst I live you shall be no man's wife save mine," he deliberately repeated. And without giving her a look, he went down the path, leaving Angélique sitting there amazed, angry, and confounded at this sudden rebellion of her life-long slave.

"How dare he!" she cried, starting up to her feet, and clenching her hands in impotent wrath. "I might not have done it just yet, for his sake, but now I will—I will, and he shall see it—no man's wife save his!—he shall see it, and let him come up here in the evening—not a word—not a look—not a sign shall he ever again get from me—not one—not one."

But Clement, who belonged to the cool and imperturbable order of Norman peasants, was not so easily scared away as Angélique thought he would be. He had looked upon her as his ever since he was a boy, and he stubbornly held her his still now that he was a man. He considered his right over her clear, and not to be dis-

puted even by Angélique herself, and so he came up to the cliff the very next evening, and though she refused to appear, he came on the evening that followed. Day after day, week after week, even when the rainy season set in, he came. In vain she kept aloof or gave him neither word nor sign. When she happened to pass him by, Clement came and sat on the broad flat stone, and sedately smoked his pipe whilst he looked at the sea.

They exchanged speech at last, but not on the cliff. On a clear, wintry night, with the cold moon shining down upon the main street of Manneville, and all the gable-ends of the little houses lit up in silvery lines on the back-ground of sky, Clement saw her coming towards him, with a short, heavily-built young man walking by her side. They parted, however, before they reached the spot where he stood waiting, and when Angélique came and passed by him, she was alone. That she saw and knew him he felt sure, but she went on and gave no token of recognition.

Clement followed and soon overtook her. "Angélique," he said, emphatically, "that was Germain."

"Yes," composedly answered the girl, "his name is Germain."

"When he saw me, he walked away and left you," resumed Clement.

Angélique turned upon him with a half-scornful, half-good-humoured look.

"Was it because Germain saw you that he left me?" she asked. "Clement, I like you—but you have odd fancies."

"You mean that because I have never been a brawler and a fighter, men need not fear me!" he said; "but I am a man, Angélique, and Germain is a coward."

Angélique quickened her step as if she scorned to reply, but Clement quickened his too. They were in a lonely part of the street now; there were no houses near them, only little gardens stretching on either side.

"No one can hear us here," said Clement. "Angélique, Germain tells you that he will marry you next spring when

his mourning for his father is out; it is not true. His banns will be published to-morrow week in the church of Manneville."

She stood and stared at him.

"His banns! And with whom?" asked she.

"With his cousin, Geneviève of Fontaine."

"Bah! it is not true," she said at last. "You would not deceive me, Clement, but you are deceived. He dare not do that to *me*," she added in a low tone—low, but full of wrath.

"A coward will do anything to a woman who has no man to protect her," answered Clement quietly.

"But he knows me," said Angélique. "He knows I would set fire to all he has if he played me false."

"He is insured," said Clement, coolly.

"But how can you know it?" she asked, turning on him suddenly.

"I told you that you should never be any other man's wife than mine whilst I

lived, and when I saw that he was after you, and that you let him be, I watched him. He went to Fontaine, so did I. He went to see his cousin Geneviève, I went to see her uncle Simon, my father's old friend, and so I knew of the courtship, though it was kept quiet, and when I also knew about the banns, I thought it time to tell you."

Angélique walked on in silence, and Clement followed her and did not speak. She went up the stony path that led to her cottage, and though she never looked back, Clement followed in her steps as if he had been her very shadow. Instead of entering her house, Angélique sat down in the moonlight and buried her face in her hands, and Clement sat on the stone facing her, and looked at the broad white sea, and waited.

At length Angélique raised her face, on which large bright tears were shining.

"They are not for me, nor for his treachery and his baseness," she said, in a broken voice. "I do not cry so easily.

They are for you, poor Clement—poor Clement," she added, pitifully, "for I am going to marry you."

Clement said not a word. Had he not always known that it would come to this, and that Angélique would marry him?

"I always liked you," she said, "but I would not ruin you. I never liked him in that way; besides, he could take care of himself. I did not want him or his money, but I wanted to set my foot on the neck of Manneville, that never had a good word to say for me. And all the time he was abetting my enemies, plotting with them to bring scorn on me. The traitor, the traitor!" she added, her wrath rising. "Shall I tell you why he has done this, Clement? I kept him at arm's length, and he wanted his revenge. Well, I shall have mine," she pursued, shaking her bright, defiant head. "I shall have mine, and be beforehand with him," said she, laughing, "for, Clement, you will have our banns read out in church to-morrow, Sunday."

Clement nodded, and said. "Very well."

"And yet," she added, in a tender pity,

"I will give you the night to think over it, poor Clement; for you are alone in this world; there is not a soul to warn or advise you, no one to say, 'Do not marry that wicked Angélique' ——"

"You are not wicked," he interrupted.

"I am, Clement. There is a devil in me that loves wickedness, just as you have in you a good angel that loves goodness. I do not say I am all bad, but—but I may try you more than you think or suspect."

Even in that imperfect light she could see the face of Clement darkening as she spoke.

"Angélique," he said, a little sternly, "I am not a jealous man, but my wife must be mine. She must not let other men look at her more than is seemly, or the good angel that you speak of would certainly leave me, and that devil you speak of too, come in his stead."

"Hush!" she cried with sudden anguish. "I never meant that, Clement, never! I will be true to you in life and in death."

"Then never mind about anything else," said he once more, quite composed.

"But I do mind. I will be true to you. Yes, but I will not alter. Do not expect me to go to mass or vespers with you. I may do so, but only when I please. Remember, I say, I give you fair warning, I will not take to your ways, but you may take to mine; and, I say it again, I am wicked, though you would never believe it."

"The curé is not in bed yet, for I saw the light shining in his window as we passed by; I shall speak to him at once," answered Clement, stubbornly.

Was it the great, faithful love in the young man's heart that moved Angélique; was it some sudden impulse of tenderness stirring in her own obdurate bosom that made her throw her arms around his neck, and, giving him that kiss which she had never granted to his rival, say softly, "Good-night Clement," then vanish so swift and light that he had not a word to say before she was gone?

Monsieur Olivier was then curé of Manneville. He had been so forty years. He had christened all his parishioners save the elder ones. He had taught them their catechism, made them make their first communion, married them, buried them too, alas! and in more senses than one been as a father to them. His tenderness for these children of his, his indulgence for their errors, his charity for their distress when they fell into poverty or trouble, were unbounded. It was but natural that a filial feeling towards so kind a pastor should exist in the hearts of the people of Manneville. Even the reprobates loved and respected the curé, and the good approached him with that tender confidence which never exists save where much love has been received as well as given.

With a happy heart, but without fear, Clement now made his way back to Monsieur Olivier's house.

The curé was correcting the last sentence in his sermon when Clement walked into

his little sitting-room, and in a quiet deliberate voice declared his errand. The priest dropped his pen, which made a great blot of ink on his walnut-wood table, and raised his mild blue eyes in grave surprise to Clement's face.

"My boy," he said, "have you thought over this well? You so pious and steady, and she so wild—poor child—so wild!"

"All that will alter when we are married," said Clement, with a confident smile.

"I trust so," replied the curé, hesitatingly. "I trust so, and that it is not you who will follow your wife's ways, but your wife who will follow yours."

There was a gentle warning in the curé's voice, but Clement no more heeded it than he had heeded Angélique's words on the cliff.

"Her ways are not bad ways," he said stoutly; "but people will find fault with her whatever she does. I have known and watched her since she was a child, and I never saw any harm in her."

"She never enters God's house," said Monsieur Olivier with a sigh.

"The dear girl has never known better," answered Clement. "When she does, she will alter."

"God grant it, Clement."

The next day was Sunday, and Angélique appeared at high mass, plainly dressed, for she was not rich, but so radiantly handsome that many a look involuntarily wandered towards the bench on which she sat. Clement too was there, and Germain, and indeed all Manneville, for it was a church-going little place, and Angélique was one of the few persons whose appearance at mass would excite surprise. But it was not surprise, it was amazement that seized on the whole congregation when the curé, settling his spectacles, read out aloud the banns of marriage between Clement and Angélique. Everyone stared at everybody else, then all the looks rapidly converged on the girl and her lover. Angélique blushed modestly, and Clement gazed straight before him with

a proud and happy look; but Germain turned sullen and seemed in a stupid dream: till, high mass over, Clement met Angélique in the porch, and there took her arm and did what all Manneville does on every fine Sunday morning after mass: that is to say, went down to the beach, and, walking up and down, looked at the sea.

The lovers were the object of universal attention. Germain, however, was not among the lookers on. He and Angélique had exchanged a look as she took her future husband's arm, and that look of mocking triumph of hers had pierced him through and through. It was one thing to jilt Angélique, and another thing to be be jilted by her; one thing to leave her to mortification and solitude, and another to see her become the wife of Clement.

The courtship of Clement was quiet and uneventful. The lovers daily met on the cliff, and there, walking up and down side by side and looking at the wintry sea below them, they settled the little there was

to settle in their future life. Clement trusted almost all to Angélique. He knew that in spite of her wild ways, she had plenty of sense, and he felt that if left to her own devices, she would know how to manage and make things comfortable. And Angélique was very good just then. She went every Sunday to high mass and vespers with Clement, and looked calmly indifferent when the banns of Germain and his cousin were read. She had been beforehand with him; and that was all she cared for. And so time slipped on, and Clement and Angélique were married on a bright cold morning, and went and lived in his house at the end of the main street. As to that house which Angélique left, Germain, finding no tenant for it, had it unroofed, and let it go to ruin rather than keep it in repair.

The wish of Clement's life was fulfilled. at last. The girl he had loved since he could remember, was his wife. A pleasant, good-tempered, thrifty wife she made him, singing like a bird whilst he sat at

his loom, and delighting his heart by going to church with him Sunday after Sunday. This lasted seven weeks, but when the eighth Sunday came round, Angélique unexpectedly declared to her husband:

"I cannot go with you, Clement."

"You are not unwell?" he asked hastily.

"Oh dear, no; but it is too dull. I tried to like it to please you, but I cannot. You must go to mass without me."

Clement tried to persuade, then to coax his wife into a change of purpose, but Angélique was obdurate.

"I told you it would be so," she said, coolly, "that I could not take to your ways. I am sorry to grieve you, my poor Clement, but I cannot help it; and you know I gave you fair warning."

Clement was too upright to say a word against this. Yes, he had been warned by Angélique herself, and he must abide by the lot he had chosen. He went to mass alone, but he found it hard, and the hardship grew as time passed, and Sunday after Sunday he left his wife at home

and went to the little church of Manneville without her. This was the only drawback to his married happiness, which, otherwise, was great; but then, what a drawback! In his secret heart Clement always hoped that Angélique would alter, as he had so confidently assured the curé she would. To his pure and pious soul it seemed so cruel and so strange that a bar such as this should exist between him and his wife. Several times he tried to argue her into a better mood; in vain; Angélique heard him impatiently, then laughed at him, then said decisively:

"Clement, you only make me worse. I tell you it is no use. You took me such as I was, and you must be content with me. Alter I will not," she added, wilfully, "so you had better give it up."

Clement was silent, and from that day forth said not another word on the subject. Summer was over, autumn had come, and with it the fair of La Chapelle, which falls on Saint Martin's day—namely, on the 11th of November. The morning

was a rainy one, and Angélique who was to go to the fair with her husband—he had business there—shook her head as she saw the heavy mist that had settled over the sea, and said shrewdly:

"I should only spoil my new cloak, Clement, if I went with you. Better stay at home, and have a good warm supper ready for you when you come in—eh?"

Clement smiled, but spite the rain and the cloak, he would have liked his wife's company. His business at the fair would soon be over, he thought, and even if they came home late, and Angélique felt tired, could not he cook the supper? Every Frenchman is more or less of a cook, and Clement had had practice in his bachelor days. But he never opposed Angélique, so he yielded, and went to La Chapelle alone. He did not meet the man he wanted until late, and it was quite supper-time, and a black, murky night as well, when he came home and entered the kitchen parlour (the "salle," as it is called in Manneville) of his little house.

Bright, warm, and homely looked the salle as Clement raised the latch and walked in. The copper warming-pan, and the pewter utensils on the walls, which had been the pride of his late mother's heart, shone in the light of the bright wood fire that crackled in the deep, old-fashioned chimney. A most savoury smell came from the earthen marmite which hung from the pot-hook, and Angélique, flushed and smiling, looked as handsome a young wife as ever rose to greet her husband after half-a-day's parting.

"God bless you! my dear heart," said Clement, giving her a hearty kiss.

"And did I not do well to stay at home?" she asked, helping him to take off his damp blouse, and deftly throwing another dry one over his neck and shoulders.

"Yes, but the day was a long one without you."

"Sit down and eat," was his wife's reply; and taking the ladle, she filled his deep plate with soup and put it down before him. "Did you see the commissioner

from Rouen?" she asked, sitting down to her own meal as she spoke.

"I did. It is all settled. I am to have weaving enough for the whole winter."

Angélique looked glad, and her husband resumed, as he drew forth a tattered old pocket-book, all loose and torn, and pushed it towards her: "I found that, too, on my way home."

"You found a treasure!" mockingly said his wife. She opened it with a look of contempt, which changed into one of startled surprise as a little bundle of bank notes fell out on the table.

"Money!" she cried. "Look, Clement: one—three—five notes of one hundred francs each! You have found a treasure, after all! We are rich, rich, Clement!" Her eyes sparkled—her cheeks were flushed; but Clement did not seem to understand.

"Money?" he repeated, "what money? whose money?"

"Ours; look!" and she fluttered the bank-notes in his face. She was strangely

excited. The devil of covetousness who tempts so many of us, high and low, was tempting Clement's wife in that hour.

"Let me see that money," he said.

She handed him the notes at once, and uttered a triumphant: "Well, was I right?" as he examined them.

"Yes; five notes of one hundred francs each," he said slowly; "five hundred francs, as you say. But, Angélique, we are no richer than we were this morning, for we must return that money to its owner." And he deliberately put the notes back in the pocket-book as he spoke.

"Return it!" she cried, angrily. "Why, it is yours! Did you not find it? It is yours, I say. Do you not understand?"

"If you had lost your gold earrings, and that Mathurine, who thinks them so handsome, had found them, would they be hers?" asked Clement.

Angélique frowned, for she felt the strength of the argument; but she could not help retorting:

"Never say you wish to please me.

How many things would not that money have got which cannot be got without it; but—do as you please." And she eat her cold soup with a sullen look.

Clement sighed, but he was too strictly honest to hesitate. He looked over the book to find out to whom it belonged, then striking his fist on the table till the cider jug and glasses rang: "Angélique," he exclaimed, "the money is Germain's. He was at the fair to-day, and the money is his."

"And you will return it," she asked, turning very pale: "return it to the coward who did his best to wrong and insult me!"

"Why not?" he answered sternly. "You know I dislike the man as much as one Christian can dislike another; but the money is his, and I will return it."

"Never, never!" she cried, and with the spring of a wild thing, she was by his side, snatched the pocket-book out of his hand, then passing swiftly to the other side of the table, faced him with wild defiance in her eyes.

Clement rose; then there was a pause, during which he and his wife stood looking at one another as they had never looked before.

"Give me back that book," he said quietly. "I can take it by force, you know, but I had rather not."

"And you had better not," said Angélique, in a low tone. "You had better not, if you care for me, Clement. I tell you that if you give that money back to Germain, all is over between us. I will leave you and go from you, and you will never find me, long as you and I may live."

"If you went to the world's end I should find you," cried Clement, in a voice of mingled wrath and tenderness. "Ay, and bring you back, too. You are my wife, and I will never give you up, Angélique, never, never!"

"Oh, I know," she laughed, "you can send the gendarmes after me, and they will bring me back here. But can gendarmes make me stay? Can they make me like and love you, Clement? No, no,"

she said triumphantly, "I have you there; and remember that I can hate well—remember it!"

He looked at her with a heart full of trouble. Was this the fond wife who half an hour ago had come to meet him with open arms and smiling eyes?

"Angélique," he cried, in a voice of great anguish, "you cannot mean that I must turn thief to keep my wife's love?"

"I warned you," stubbornly said Angélique, "that you would never make me like yourself, but that I might make you like me. I gave you fair warning; you must abide by it now."

"Angélique, do not tempt me."

But Angélique only smiled and shook her bright head. He was yielding.

"Do not," he said again.

Again she shook her head at him and laughed; but in a moment, before she was aware of it, he was by her side, his strong arms were around her, and the book was in his strong right hand.

"And you think to prevail over me so,"

she cried, shaking herself free from him and springing to the door. "You think I will let that traitor have his money back and spend it on his Geneviève?"

"And do *you* think I would let you have one sou of Germain's money!" cried Clement, with flashing eyes. "I would rather never see your face again than see you wear a cotton kerchief bought out of that five hundred francs!"

He had touched a chord in his wife's heart at last. The wrath passed from her handsome face. "Let us do this," she said, impetuously. "Throw that book into the fire, so that he has not the money; what do I care for it?"

"No, I cannot do that."

"Then good-bye to you. You know the cost of your fancy?"

She stood by the door with her hand on the latch, as if ready to fly out into the dark night away from him for ever and ever. He looked at her, but there was no relenting in her eyes. Germain's money was the price he must pay for her

love. Standing thus, gazing into his face with smiling defiance, she looked like a beautiful but evil angel who had only come across his life to tempt him down into the depths of sin.

"Germain is rich; he does not want that money," thought Clement, "and I want my wife; she is all I have—I want my wife."

"Be it so," he said aloud, and, without taking time to think, he flung the book into the fire. He looked at it as the flames consumed it greedily, and he vaguely felt that in those flames the honour and the pride of his life were burning too.

Early the next morning old Baptiste, the drummer, went all over Manneville beating his drum, followed by a troop of boys, and every now and then pausing to proclaim, in his cracked and feeble voice, that Maître Germain Grandsire had lost a pocket-book last night, and would give a handsome reward to the individual who had found and would restore the said

pocket-book with the five hundred francs that were in it. As if to render Angélique's revenge on her enemy more complete, the very first place where Baptiste stopped to make his proclamation was opposite her door. A bright morning had followed the murky night, and she stood on the threshold radiant as the sunshine that poured upon her. With a lurking smile on her rosy lips, she turned into the house and found her husband, who, pale as death, had stood listening behind her. She gave him a look of some scorn, and began to sing, in a voice as clear as a lark's, whilst he went back to his loom, which he had left to hear Baptiste's news.

"He is not working," thought Angélique, listening in vain for the click of the loom in one of the pauses of her song.

True, Clement was not working. He was thinking that there is a terrible attribute in sin: it is irreparable. "It is like death," thought Clement, in his quiet silent way. "It is done and it cannot be

undone. I should work years before I could save five hundred francs. I can never do it—never. I must live and die with that sin upon me. I can never atone —never atone."

Yes, man may repent, God may forgive, and the world never know the sinner's wrong, but atonement is seldom if ever within the sinner's reach. This was the thought over which Clement now brooded. Angélique read it in his face when he came out at noon. She read, too, the look he cast to the fire as he sat down to dinner: a look that seemed to ask the pitiless flames why they had been so ready to do his bidding. She wished he would speak, say something, upbraid her; she wished he would do anything but look so downcast and sit there so silent. But words had never been in Clement's way, and now he neither reproached his wife nor opened his heart to her. She guessed much indeed, and felt secret wrath at his remorse; but she never guessed how keen it was, nor how

deep was his trouble, till Sunday came round. Angélique was a fond and careful wife, on this Sunday morning she laid as usual her husband's clean linen and black silk necktie on the bed in their room. She might not go to mass with Clement, but she liked to see him look his best in the church of Manneville, and she was taking down his coat to brush it, when he said to her:

"You need not, Angélique. I am not going to mass to-day."

"Are you not well?" she asked, turning round quickly.

"Quite well; but I am not going to mass."

"Why so?"

"I have no business in the church," he said gloomily, and he left the room as he spoke, and went down to the little patch of garden behind the house. His wife looked at him from the window, and saw him walking listlessly up and down, whilst the November sun was shining, and the

church bells filled the air with their music.

"I knew it," she cried, flinging herself across the bed in her woe. "I told him so; I have ruined him, and he is a lost man." She felt no remorse, and no shame. She would have confessed her deed to all Manneville, and laughed in Germain's face, but the evil she had wrought Clement pierced her very heart with sorrow.

A week after this there broke over Manneville such a storm as had not been known within the memory of man. Thunder filled the air with clamour, and lightning flashed across the black sky, and a wild hurricane swept over the cliffs and went out to meet the roaring waves of the sea. Clement's daily task was over, and he had taken his evening meal with his wife; a silent one, he so rarely spoke now; when he suddenly rose and said:

"I must go and give it a look." He walked out as he spoke without answer-

ing, without hearing, perhaps, Angélique's rejoinder:

"Wait for me, Clement."

"He would have heard me formerly," thought she, in bitter mortification, but she did not follow him, till the stream of people going by tempted her to. Why should she stay within? She locked the door and went out. The night was frightful, but Angélique was fearless and sure of foot. Spite the fury of the wind, she made her way to the beach, and was soon one of the crowd that had gathered there to see what could be seen of the tempest that now raged all along the shore. What a night it was! Darkness above, a gleam of white foam below, fiery streaks of light, a pealing of thunder, an incessant roaring of the great waves. What was man in such a turmoil of the elements as this? Angélique was filled with awe; she would have liked to feel her husband near her; but she looked in vain for him. Other faces she saw whenever the lightning flashed, but not his.

"Why should I wait and look for one who does not want me?" thought Clement's wife, angrily; and she was turning homewards when the voices of a group of men caught her ear in a lull of the storm and compelled her to stand and listen. What mad, wild tale were they telling?

The strange guest at the inn was sending off a messenger with a telegram to Saint Dizier when the storm began. The messenger at once refused to go. He could not cross the cliffs on such a night. The gentleman threatened, coaxed, bribed, in vain. The matter was one of life and death to him, he said.

"Yes," answered the man, "and so it was to him life and death."

Then the stranger came amongst the people on the beach, and asked what brave fellow would do his errand for a good round sum of money.

"How much will you give?" asked a voice from the crowd. "It was Jean's you know," said the speaker.

"No, it was not Jean's; it was Mathieu's," said other voices.

"How much do you want?"

"Five hundred francs."

The stranger demurred, then yielded. The bargain was struck, the man went. "And Clement will never reach Saint Dizier, and never give in the telegram, and never come back," said the last speaker. "For you are all wrong, it was Clement, and not Mathieu."

"Never—never," cried Angélique, sinking down on the hard shingle, and tearing her fair hair. "Never—never."

Fated words that came but too true. In vain did Clement give his young life to earn the money that should redeem his sin. The story of that cruel night was never rightly known, but what there was none to tell, everyone could easily surmise. When, with the first streak of light, Angélique found her husband in that hollow of the cliff against which the fury of the hurricane had dashed him, almost as soon as he had attempted to

cross the downs, he was dying, and all he could or would say was, "Do not move me," and "send for the curé."

"He is here," she answered, for she had not come alone.

As soon as the wrath of the night had subsided, all the men of Manneville, with the maire and the curé at their head, had turned out to look for Clement.

"Here I am, my poor fellow," said the curé, coming forward.

Clement moaned, then looked at his wife as much as to say, "Tell him."

"Stand back all of you," said she, almost fiercely, as she motioned the crowd away with an imperious gesture of her hand! "And you, Monsieur le curé," she added, in a low tone, "come nearer and listen, and I will tell you Clement's confession."

It was a strange and awful scene. No trace of wrath in the clear morning sky: Nature seeming to waken to sweetness and light, as after the calmest of slumbers: a dying man looking his last at this lovely

world, and on her knees by him a sinning woman telling a mild, white-haired priest the story of the wrong-doing that was costing life to one and to the other bitter remorse and life-long tears.

"He did it, but I made him do it," said Angélique, when the tale was told. "And now, Clement, hear me. You know me, and that to what I say I keep. You may die in peace. The money shall be repaid. I tell you it shall be," she added, in a voice of subdued passion and energy. "And yet no one shall ever know. Though I work till I am old and grey, it shall be paid back, and no one save the curé here shall ever know—shall ever know; and, Clement, I know you would like to meet me in the next world. Well then, so help me Heaven, I will do my best to live here so as to meet you there."

Her cheeks were flushed, her dry eyes burned like fire as she raised her hand to Heaven in solemn protest. A faint smile passed over the pallid face of the dying

man. Tears were flowing down the cheeks of the priest, his dealings had been with small sins and common sinners. Never with anything so tragic as this story of Clement and his wife.

"That will do, child," said he, motioning her away. "You must leave me with your husband."

She moved away out of hearing and knelt on the hard stones with her eyes fixed on Clement's face. The curé was bending towards him, uttering a few whispered words of comfort. "You repent your sin, do you not? Yes, poor fellow—poor fellow. Well, then, do not despair. Think of Christ on the cross; think of the penitent thief whose life of crime was effaced in one moment, and hope for mercy."

Clement could not speak, but the look of his sunken eyes assented to every word. The priest raised his hand, and in the name of Heaven absolved the penitent sinner, and even as the solemn words

were uttered, that poor sinner's soul passed away.

Thus ended the brief story of Angélique's wedded life and Clement's ill-fated love. And no one knew, no one suspected, how and why Clement had allowed five hundred francs to tempt him to almost certain death. People wondered, indeed, but after a time they forgot to think it so strange; and Angélique, whom no one would dream of questioning, was left to her sorrow and her widowhood. She bore both in stoic silence, asking comfort or counsel from none. She sold off all that her husband had left, also what belonged to herself, and when her home was bare she made up a little bundle and turned her back upon Manneville. At once unkind tongues were busy at Angélique's expense. They knew what it was. She had coveted a gold watch and chain, and it was to get them for her that poor Clement had given his life, and now she had gone away from Manneville to trade in her beauty and get some other

husband in another place, where her wickedness was less known. For once, Monsieur Olivier, the curé, so gentle and so mild, got really angry. He silenced the scandal-mongers individually, as well as he could, and preached a vigorous sermon against scandal in general, for the benefit of all. He knew whither Angélique was gone and with what purpose, and though he could explain nothing, his kind heart would not let her be wronged undefended. "The poor child has no one to stand by her now," he said; "her husband is dead, she is away, and how dare any of you try and take her good name from her." No more was said within his hearing, but Manneville thought none the better of poor Angélique.

She had been gone a month, when to his surprise the curé met her one morning at the churchyard gate carrying her bundle in her hand.

"Why, Angélique," said he, kindly, "have you come back to us?"

Angélique shook her head.

"I only came back to see his grave. I did not like where I was. I did not earn money fast enough," she added, sadly. "My Clement must not wait too long."

"Then stay with us in Manneville, Angélique."

"Live in the same place with Germain Grandsire?" she cried, her blue eyes flashing. "Never. *He* drove me wild, and I drove *him* to do it and to die."

"Child," said Monsieur Olivier, gently, "you must forgive Germain. The hand of God has been heavy upon him since you left us. His wife has gone raving mad: he dare not put her in an asylum, lest her friends should take her away and claim all her money back. She was rich, you know, and no one can he find who will stay and mind her in his own house. Can you not forgive him now?" added the curé, gently.

But Angélique did not seem to heed him. Her face lit with sudden hope.

"Mad! he sent her mad," she cried. "I know he did. Monsieur le curé, I

will take care of his mad wife, and he shall pay me well to do it."

"You, Angélique? but——"

"I am afraid of nothing," she broke in, with her dauntless look. "I will do it."

She went swiftly down the path before the curé could utter another word. In a few minutes she had reached Germain Grandsire's great, old farm, and made her way to his presence. She found him in a low, dark salle, standing by a dingy secrétaire on which money was spread. He turned round sharply as she came in.

"Why, who are you?" he began, "and —what?" Then he paused, and stared at her.

"I am Angélique," said she; "and I know what you want," she added, by way of greeting. "I come to do it for you?"

"You!"

"Yes," she resumed, "why not? I am strong, and I think you know I am fearless. I will take care of her, and you

need not send her out of the house and let her friends have her back again. Of course you want to keep your rich wife, Germain," said Angélique, with a smile. "Well, I will do it; only you must pay me well for it—very well indeed. If she dies to-morrow, you must give me—let me see," she added, seeming to meditate, "we will say six hundred francs, and if she lives a year you need give me no more —you understand?"

Yes, Germain did understand, and he stared in mingled doubt and amazement at the beautiful woman whom he had once liked after a fashion of his own.

"Six hundred francs is too much," said he at length. "Besides——"

A fearful shriek, which rang through the whole house, interrupted him. Angélique smiled.

"Too much," she said. "You think it too much, and you can find no one to do it for love or money."

He tried to bargain, but Angélique only walked to the door.

"Have it then," he grumbled. "Yet it is too much; for suppose, as you say, she dies to-morrow."

But he yielded, and took her at once to the darkened room where Geneviève, bound hand and foot, now spent her days.

"Take care," he cried, as he opened the door and stepped back hastily. "She has got loose."

Angélique looked round at him in quiet scorn, walked into the room alone and shut the door behind her. The place was dark, but a ray of light slipped in through the shutters and showed her Germain's wife standing free from her bonds with wild looks and dishevelled hair.

Angélique threw the window open and gazed steadily at the mad woman, who scowled in return.

"Geneviève, I am strong," she said, "and I am not afraid, and I will be kind to you; but"—she raised her finger—"you must obey me."

That fearless look, that low, even voice

quelled Geneviève's rage in a moment. She began to moan and weep.

"I will be kind to you," said Angélique again. "And now sit down and let me comb your hair."

Geneviève obeyed in stupid silence, and the power thus acquired in that first moment Angélique lost no more. She ruled Geneviève like a child; cure her she could not, but master her she did. Only at what cost did she do so? Geneviève would sit in a dark room, and Angélique had to sit with her there. She moaned all day long, talking of hidden enemies who sought her life, and Angélique had to sit and listen. She spent sleepless nights, and Angélique had to watch her through them. On Sunday mornings, indeed, she bound her firmly, and left her to go to early mass, for she had promised Clement that his ways should be her ways, and she kept her word. But otherwise she stayed with her always; and days and weeks and months of this terrible life wore on: till, when summer ended and autumn set in,

death mercifully released the mad woman and her keeper.

The funeral was scarcely over when Angélique appeared before her master with her bundle in her hand.

"Maître Germain," she said, "your wife is dead. I did my duty by her. Will you pay me my wages, six hundred francs."

Germain's face fell.

"Six hundred francs, and the year is not out," said he. "Angélique, it is too much. You see I have had losses. I lost five hundred francs last Saint Martin's day, and that money was to bring me in twenty, fifty per cent., and I lost it! And my wife's illness cost me a world of money, and now you want six hundred francs."

"Deny me that money if you dare," said Angélique, with a flash in her blue eyes.

And he did not dare to deny it. He fumbled at his pocket-book and brought

out six notes of a hundred francs each, and placed them sullenly before her. She looked at the money like one in a dream, but did not attempt to touch it.

"I think I will not take it," she said. "I might lose or spend it; better leave it to you, Germain. You will turn it to use, and—yes, I will leave it to you."

"But you are not giving it to me," said Germain, staring. "You will claim it from me some day."

"Ay, some day," she answered, with a short laugh, "we will settle our accounts, do not fear; we will on the great day of all, if on no other. In the meanwhile keep the money and use it. I know what I am doing."

"Well, as you say, it will be safer with me," he muttered, putting the notes back in his pocket-book, and looking at her stealthily as he spoke. She had grown thin, but there was a flush on her cheeks and a light in her eyes, and she had never been more beautiful and stately than she was now.

"Why do you go?" he asked.

"Why should I stay?"

"Why do you go?" he persisted, "We might marry now, you know," he added slowly; "after a while, of course."

Angélique laughed in his face. "The last words I spoke to my Clement were that I should so behave in this world that I hoped we should meet in the next," she answered, in her old defiant way. "Do you think it is as *your* wife my Clement would like to meet me there! Besides, take my advice, you were not over kind to poor Geneviève; be in no hurry to look for another wife. And now good-bye and good luck to you, Maître Germain Grandsire."

With a cool nod she left him. He stared after her moodily. "She is handsomer than ever, the beggarly beauty," he muttered; "yet I am glad she said no; she is only a beggar after all." On leaving the farm, Angélique went up the main street to the curé's house. The curé was out, said the servant.

"Bid him good-bye for me," said Angélique. "I am leaving Manneville."

She went on her way and climbed up the cliff, where Clement and she had so often met. She sat on the broad, flat stone where he used to sit, and thence she saw in the mellow light of the setting sun the ruins of her old home; the sea which Clement and she had looked at together; the hollow of the cliff where the fierce hurricane had dashed him, and on the other side of the valley the little churchyard where he lay.

There are hours and moods in which we all go over our old life, be the retrospect brief or long, and such an hour was this to Angélique. A pause, a resting place between the future and the past, in which thought, like a weary bird of passage, folded its drooping wings awhile and let the present go by. For what the future might yet be, she cared nothing; it mattered so little what became of her now: but, oh! how dark, and drear, and tragic had been the past—that past, of which

her own hands had woven warp and woof! could she ever forget it? could she ever put it by like a thing that we would look at no more? Ah! surely never—never.

The sound of a step roused her from her dark dream.

"I guessed you were here," said a voice behind her.

She looked up and rose slowly to face the curé, who came up all breathless with his rapid ascent.

"Yes," she answered, looking at him dreamily. "I came and told him."

"Child," he remonstrated, gently.

"I came and told him," she pursued, with tears in her eyes and a smile on her lips as life seemed to come back to her sad young face. "I think the dead hear us, Monsieur le Curé. I am sure my Clement hears me, I talk to him so often and he seems to answer. And I am glad now, for a while ago I felt as if he were happy; it was like a little whisper, but I felt it.

Yes, I am sure he is glad, and so, as it is all over, I can go away for good. And good-bye to you, Monsieur le Curé, and God's blessing be on you for all your kindness."

Her voice was gentle and low; this was scarcely like the Angélique of old times, but the priest knew that nature is strong, and he would have liked to keep the wayward girl under his wing. He tried to persuade her to stay, but Angélique was Angélique still, she had a will of her own and was obdurate. "But money," argued Monsieur Olivier, "have you got money enough? I know that Germain paid you well, but I can guess how you disposed of the money, poor child. Have you any of it left?"

"Not a sou of it would I keep," said she, with the old flash in her eyes. "I left it all to him—all, and he rejoiced in it; and, as I told him, we will settle accounts on the great judgment day, and let him accuse my Clement then if he dare! No, my husband gave his blood and I gave

the gold, and we are quits. Keep any of his money! Did not my Clement once tell me he would rather never see my face again than that I should wear a cotton kerchief bought with it; but I have this," said she, taking a gold piece from the bosom of her dress, where she wore it sewed up in a piece of cloth like a locket, "It remained to me after I sold his things, and it will do. There will be a blessing in it, Monsieur le Curé, as there was a curse in that other money and would ever have been. Here I cannot stay," she continued, more calmly. "My task is done. The place would kill me; worse, it might make me wicked again. I am young and strong; I must fight my way through the world. It will tame me," she added, "for I am still a bit wild, Monsieur le Curé."

"Yes, but you have been a good child. God bless you."

He gently laid his hand on her head; she took his other hand, and raised it to her lips, and said softly:

"You will pray for me, will you not?"

"Ay, child. Well, God be with you since you will go. Perhaps it is best," he thought, looking at her as she stood before him in all the pride and strength of her gentle and grand beauty, a creature sorely chastised, but not yet conquered. "Only, where are you going?"

Perhaps Angélique did not know this herself: perhaps, with her old wilfulness, she did not care to answer the question.

"Who knows!" said she, with a half wistful look. "The world is wide, and there are many roads that lead from Manneville. Only one thing you may be sure of—no road that would part me from him will I ever take."

These were her last words.

She took up her bundle, and, with one sad look around her, she walked down the path that led to the sea. He stood and watched her. She shunned the village and entered the lane that lies at the back of the houses. The sun had long left it.

It was shadowy and dim, and in the dimness and the shadow, the figure of Angélique slowly vanished, and thus passed away for ever from Manneville.

THE END.

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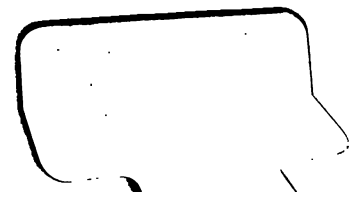
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